one more chance?

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one more chance?

by theartofliving

Summary

“That’s my bed, you know. Oh and I thought you said you weren’t cold?” Neil grinned at Todd’s body lying on his bed.

“Shut it. I’ll move in a minute.”

“Stay there as long as you want, I don’t mind.”

God, Todd was in love with him.
****
Neil survives, and Todd writes him love letters. Not that he knows about these letters, not yet at least.

Notes

Hello guys!! Ive been thinking about writing a fic for a long long time and I hope you guys love this! I'm trying to update every few days/week, so stay tuned for the next update <3
This is set after the play, Neil survives but the Poets don't know what happened that night (yet).

Chapter 1: watching some good friends screaming "get me out"

Chapter Notes

hey guys!! ive been thinking about this for a long time and this is my first fic !!
this is set after the play, neil survives, but no one knows what happened (yet)
please check out my tiktok: spidey.lana
feel free to leave kudos/comments i love seeing your support !!

My dearest, Neil,

You were a wonderful Puck, my love. You were born to act, you shone upon the stage like the brightest star in the skies. Forgive my cliches, I seem to always act like a lovesick teenager around you. I think I've spent too much time with Knox as of late. I truly have no words for your performance; you've rendered the poet speechless. I do have one word, however, and that word is beautiful. It encapsulates you perfectly.

Don't listen to what your father has to say. He is a hateful man who uses you for personal gain. Please, sweetheart, follow your dreams. He cannot step away from the mirror long enough to see the marvellous son he already has. You are magnificent and he's a fool if he can't see that. You have so much to say, so much to do, so many more plays to act in. God, don't let that man extinguish your flame. You are not trapped, you just don't know how to get out. If I'm being honest I dont have much of an idea either but, Neil, I swear I'll get you out, whether it kills me or not. I've spent my life in someone elses shadow, and I won't let you suffer the same fate. You should tell him how you feel, please, I know it's terrifying but we'll all be there: me, Charlie, Meeks, Pitts, Knox, Keating, and even Cameron.

It's hypocritical of me to tell you to speak your mind, isn't it? I've been in love with you ever since the courtyard where you told me your name, yet you still have no idea what you do to me. I think I've always been yours. These letters stay safely away whilst I stare longingly at your side of our room (I really have been spending too much time with Knox). I look for pieces of you in all the poetry I read. Everything I write has always been about you, I might as well write 'Neil Neil Neil' and it wouldn't be much different. I always wonder

what it would be like if you loved me back, would we lie in bed reading Shakespeare's sonnets, would we walk around the lake together, would we kiss and touch the way they do in the movies? I guess I'll never know. Please, don't hate me.

Yours for all of eternity,
T. A.

****

"Do you believe in the Loch Ness monster?"

"Neil, what?" Todd replied, looking at his roommate with a look that could only be described as confusingly amused.

They sat on the roof of the Welton library, a favourite haunt of Tood's (after he realised the door was rarely ever locked going out to this specific roof). He'd bought Neil here for the first time tonight under the pretense of sharing his newest poem away from the prying eyes and ears of the Poets. They'd planned on going back to their dorm after, but had gotten slightly sidetracked by Neil saying whatever popped into his head and therefore starting a completely unrelated question. Not that Todd minded, of course.

"Like, do you think the monster is real? People spend their lives searching for something that might not even be real," Neil said, laying down on the cold stone, "I think it's kinda stupid, but also not"

"Aren't you meant to be good with words, Mr Actor? Besides, if you really believe in something, are you wasting your life away? Everyone thinks differently, you know,"

"I guess you're right there, Anderson. Still havent answered my question though, do you believe?"

"Can't say I do, there's like no evidence for it," he joined Neil on the stone roof. They looked at each other laying down on the roof. Todd thought Neil looked absolutely heavenly laying down with smoke lightly escaping his mouth.

"C'mon, I'm going to freeze my hands off if we stay out here any longer", Neil stood up suddenly, grabbing onto Todd's hands, "It's the middle of winter and you've come out here in just a sweater, you've got to be cold."

Todd was, in fact, colder than he'd ever been in his life, but that didn't

really matter when he was with Neil. He was still in his Welton uniform but he'd swapped the scratchy black sweater for his favourite dark blue sweater. In his reading-poetry-to-Neil anxiety driven state he'd forgotten his coat, and to say he regretted this decision was an understatement.

Todd stood up, dropping his hands from Neil's. "I'm not cold, I'm fine. It's not even that cold out here. Are you cold?"

Neil didn't answer the question, instead he looked at Todd in that indescribable way he often did. It reminded Todd of the poem he'd recited in Keating's class several weeks ago, and the way Neil looked up at him then.

They walked the short distance to the library roof door, picking up their various notebooks and pens. Neil pushed open the door and walked inside, Todd walking behind him. They moved down the hallway before getting ambushed by their good friend Charlie Dalton. "Anderson! Perry! Well, if it isn't my favourite poet and actor. Anyway, there's a study group, my room, 8pm sharp. Neil, Knoxious said he needed some chemistry help. And I don't know about you guys but I sure need some assistance in Latin. Please come, I'm not sure how long I can spend with Cameron before I go crazy," Charlie practically said screaming, doing some sort of awkward walk/run down the dorm hallway. "I'll cry if you're not there!"

"Strange man, that Dalton. Todd, you're coming to the study group, though I doubt much studying will be done with their bickering," Neil remarked, shaking his head slightly at his best friend's antics.

"What, don't I have free will anymore?" Todd joked, "I'm pretty sure I have Hager's trig to do, I'll just stay in the dorm and do that."

"Great! You should ask Meeks about that. Honestly, that man is a genius."

"I don't want to burden him in any way, he's probably got enough of his own work."

"Todd, you're not burdening anyone. We all ask eachother questions, you asking for help doesn't inconvenience anyone, okay?"

Todd hated feeling like this. He couldn't really remember a time where he didn't feel like he was burdening everyone else around him. The first real memory he had of his parents was when he was six, sat around the long wooden dining table they didn't really use anymore.

He'd tried telling them about his new drawing he'd done, but they were more interested in Jeffery's award that he got from something or other. The best he'd gotten was a glance and a "that's nice" from his mother. From then on, he didn't speak at the table. Even when he won the award for best creative writing, or when he got all A's in calculus or even when he wanted to share a funny anecdote about his day.

"You alright in there, Anderson?" Neil asked.

"Yeah? Yeah, I'm fine, just a little cold." Todd said, opening the door to their shared room and falling onto Neil's bed. Accidentally, of course.

"That's my bed, you know. Oh and I thought you said you weren't cold?" Neil grinned at Todd's body lying on his bed.

"Shut it. I'll move in a minute."

"Stay there as long as you want, I don't mind."

God, Todd was in love with him.

They had about half an hour before the study group Charlie had planned. Todd walked over to one of his many notebooks, the slightly battered red one he kept in his desk drawer. He wrote his letters to Neil in this one, as well as poems and lines that reminded him of said roommate. Not that Neil would ever see them, of course.

Todd knew what would happen if Neil found those sinful letters, he would cast him out, turn their friends against them, ask to switch rooms, probably make sure everyone in the town knew Todd was the devil in disguise. He could imagine what would happen if Neil did love him back, but that's all it really was, wasn't it? His imagination.

Chapter 2: i think of him so much, it drives me crazy

Chapter Notes

hey !! this is a quick filler chapter before we get to the plot (which is coming soon btw) <3
not too sure if i like or hate this one if im being fr
also for some reason italics doesnt wanna work for me
tiktok: spidey.lana

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Being called a 'stiff' without even having said hello didn't make for the best first impression, so it was safe to say Todd wasn't the biggest fan of Cameron. Todd didn't dislike him, not entirely, but they rarely spoke to eachother and had probably never been in the same room without another Poet present.

The Poets were sat in Cameron and Dalton's room, Meeks sat on Charlie's chair, Charlie, Todd and Neil sat on Charlie's bed,or rather Todd and Neil sat, whilst Charlie opted to lie down, squishing the other two boys in the process. Cameron sat at his own desk, his textbooks and notebooks organised in a way Todd couldn't really understand. Pitts and Knox hadn't arrived yet, Cameron's bed stood free of any teenage boys.

"Charles, my good friend, don't you think it would be a fantastic idea if you moved to the other bed?" Neil asked with that joking tone he often used in conversation with Charlie.

It wasn't like Todd was jealous of their friendship, obviously. He loved Charlie's outgoing and loud personality, he could be annoying at times, but he stood up for his friends and was always there when anyone needed him. Todd had grown close to him during his months at Welton, and although they had completely binary personalities, they were good friends. It was just that he'd never had any long-lasting friendships full of inside jokes and playful conversations. He never had those deep conversations, or those happy memories playing as kids. Charlie and Neil had been friends practically since birth, their parents had been acquaintaces long before that. It hurt him slightly, to look at them both smiling and wishing he could experience that.

"And sit on Richard's bed? I can feel my coolness start melting away

when I'm in the same room as him! And you suggest I sit nearer him? Neil, I thought we were friends," Charlie dramatically exclaimed.

Cameron perked up at the mention of his name, "If you hate me so much, Dalton, why don't you ask to switch rooms? I'm sure you-"

However, he got cut off by a loud crash outside the door, and the door swinging open to reveal Pitts, followed by a slightly dazed looking Knox.

A loud chorus of "Pitts!" "Knox!" filled the tiny room. One voice asked "What the hell was that noise out there?", and to be honest, Todd wanted to know the same thing.

"Don't worry about it, guys!" Pitts said, plonking down on the free bed with Knox next to him. Todd realised he was holding some sort of new sort of contraption, a cross between a radio and something else Todd couldn't quite place. It wasn't unusual to see Pitts holding a new invention, he was often working on a 'science project' with Meeks in the corner of whatever room they inhabited at the time.

Charlie looked over at Knox on the bed, "Knox, my dearest darling, you said you need help with chemistry, but would you be a dear and help me with this Latin. It's due tomorrow, and I haven't translated a single word."

Knox went over to Charlie to help translate, more specifically, do all the work for him and complain about him not listening. Meeks was holding a trigonometry lesson for the other Poets, Todd was attempting to listen but he'd gotten rather distracted by a certain brunette boy.

Neil looked breath-taking in the dim light of the dorm room, he was laughing at something Charlie said to Knox. His hair was slightly messy from the times he'd run his hands through it, it had gotten a bit long recently and he was trying to get it away from his eyes every few seconds. His eyes carried the spark in them that Todd hadn't seen as of late, not since he came back from the night of his play. Todd was enraptured by them.

They worked quietly after that, all of them focusing on their tasks. Apart from Charlie, of course, who was scribbling in his biology textbook and randomly shouting whatever question he thought of at that moment.

"Todd, I'm gonna go back to our dorm, care to join me?" Neil asked,

looking at Todd who was now sat across from him.

He nodded, and without speaking, packed up his workbooks and pencils and left with Neil following him. He was tired by now, he still wasn't used to waking up this early in the morning and going to sleep so late at night.

"Not up for speaking much, huh?" Neil said, Todd nodding along. Neil always seemed to know when to leave Todd alone and seemed to understand that he wasn't always wanting conversation. "That's alright, you don't always have to speak. Not with me at least."

He opened the door to their dorm, letting Todd walk in first before shutting the door. Neil messily shoved all his books into his school bag before opening his closet with a bit too much force, grabbed his clothes and walked into the bathroom.

Todd walked over to his desk and took out his notebook. This was his favourite part of the day, writing his secret love letters to Neil. If anyone asked, they weren't love letters. Some of them were proclamations of undying love, but most of them were things he'd noticed about Neil, or things that annoyed him, many included his complaints about Jeffery, or how his own family treated him. It was a way to express his feelings, in a way that he didn't have to share with other people who he knew would just cast him to one side.

To say he was exhausted was an understatement, he swiftly got changed and walked into the bathroom. A few minutes later, he was back in his room with Neil, and if he heard a "good night", he would say he dreamed it up.
****

Neil,
I saw you today, at the study group. You probably thought I didn't notice you, but I always seem to do. I haven't seen you that happy since the night of the play, I think about that night often.

You've always had that light in your eyes, that everlasting flame, but that night it seemed to be extinguished. I don't know what happened, and I'm sure you'll never tell me, but if you did, please know that I'll listen to you. I'll listen to whatever you say, darling, even if it's your stupidest thought, but nothing you say is stupid.

Sorry, I'm rambling. I stand by what I say, though. You seemed happier today, laughing at Charlie's idiotic jokes and Knox's lovesick waffle about Chris. It's nice to see you laughing and being happy.

Your hair was longer today, I know this may be biased but I do prefer the slightly longer hair on you, but I'm not sure Welton (or Nolan) will agree. Does it annoy you? Almost everytime I look at you writing you seem to be pushing it away from your eyes. Perhaps next week you'll go into town and get it cut, and maybe you'll ask me to join. Maybe we can go for a walk to the bookshop, I know you love the battered copies of Shakespeare, and we can go down the stream to that little diner.

Who am I kidding? I don't think that will ever happen. Not the way I want it to at least. It's strange spending time with you, Neil. Please, don't get me wrong, I feel like everythings easier when I'm around you, and you understand me in the way no one else has. But, I can barely resist kissing you. I don't know if I want to kiss you or run away from you. I know it'll ruin what we already have, and I would rather never read Whitman again then lose you. Punch me in the face and kick me out of this school, maybe it would help get over these feelings. Again, who am I kidding? I don't think I'll ever be over you.

Yours for all of eternity,
T. A.

Chapter End Notes

hope you guys enjoyed that one!! the next few chapters are (hopefully) gonna be more plot based
please leave kudos and comments, con-crit is very much appreciated as this is my first fic and english is my third language
stay safe and have fun
- L

Chapter 3: look into your eyes and the skys the limit

Chapter Notes

hi !! i just wanna say i am so so grateful for all your support on this fic, i really appreciate it <3
i wrote half of this on the train and half of this listening to hamilton
hope you guys enjoy <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Todd hated how monotonous and dreary each day at Welton was, affectionately nicknamed 'Hellton' by his peers, and Todd was beginning to see why. He didn't despise his lessons, in fact he quite liked a few (mainly History and English, mainly because he could write an essay far better than he could solve maths equations) but the constant routine made him dread waking up each day.

He woke up at 6am most days, he always got up before the other boys to use the showers and bathroom before they started crowding in. Usually, he'd put on his scratchy Welton uniform, which actually used to be Jeffery's. Although his family had more money than they'd probably ever need in their lives, they claimed it was 'unnecessary' to spend money on it, and gave Todd the old uniform. He hated this, he really hated this. The uniform reminded him everyday of Jeffery's presence, how he'd been so much better, always getting top grades in every class, always just that little bit better than him.

By this time, Neil was probably awake. Neil had always woken up later than Todd, he only had a few minutes to quickly run down to the bathroom and put on his own uniform before the bell rang for breakfast. This specific morning, however, Neil looked particularly messy, his hair was sticking up in every single direction, his tie was half undone, and his blazer was buttoned in the wrong way.

"Neil, your tie is messed up, by the way" Todd said, calmly putting his books into his bag.

Neil, however, was not calm. He was simultaneously trying to put on his shoes, fix his uniform and his hair, in Todd's opinion, he was making it worse. "You think I didn't notice that, Todd? I've got about a thousand things to do before the bell goes," Neil stated.

“Here, just let me fix it for you,” Todd moved towards him, reaching up to push his hair out of his face and straighten out his tie.

It was as if time had stopped, Todd was touching him, touching his hair, so close that they shared the same breath. Neil was looking at him in that godforsaken way he always did, his beautiful brown eyes blown wide. Todd’s hands moved swiftly fixing his tie and blazer, barely looking at Neil. Todd cleared his throat before stepping away awkwardly.

They walked down to the main hall together, meeting some of their friends along the way. To be honest, Todd wasn’t paying the slightest bit of attention to them, he was daydreaming about that moment with Neil in their dorm. They all walked to their usual table, Todd grabbing a plate of food, all he could remember was that it tasted awful.

He was still thinking about that moment all throughout breakfast, whilst the other Poets were chatting, mostly complaining, and joking around. Although he was actively trying not to, he kept catching Neil’s eye from across the table. In that second, Todd could feel his face burning up and his ability to speak leave.

“Hey Todd, do you wanna work together on the history project?” someone across the table asked.

“Uhh, yeah. Sure.” he replied, staring at something in the distance. He didn’t even know who asked him.

“You losers are gonna fail now, I’ve got Mr Anderson,” the same voice said.

After breakfast, Todd seemed to snap back into reality, mostly because he’d have to fully focus on trigonometry to understand it. He realised he’d agreed to doing a history project with Charlie Dalton, which he was slightly dreading, but that was a problem for future Todd to deal with.

After surviving trigonometry, he made his way over to Latin. He didn’t mind Latin, he just found it rather boring to go over the same translations over and over again. McAllister had the most monotone voice Todd had ever heard, by the time the lesson ended Todd felt like he really needed a nap.

The only saving grace was Knox, who sat next to him and often wrote notes to him. The notes mainly consisted of poems declaring his love for Chris, or random conversations about whatever he thought about

at that moment. Knox was one of his best friends, apart from Neil of course. They had the same interests, they both loved reading, they loved poetry, and they also loved coffee. In the few months of friendship, they often loaded eachother books (Knox preferring cheesy romance novels, where Todd preferred the classics, with so many hidden meanings that no one could decipher) and had long winded conversations about what they enjoyed and what they hated about the books.

Latin passed slowly, the hour stretching into what felt like days, but finally they were free to go to biology. Todd didn't like the sciences much, but he found biology to be the one he understood most. He wasn't really sure what was going on in that lesson, he was more focused on staring at the back of Neils head, remembering how his hair felt that morning.

The rest of the day passed in a blur, lunch was truly unremarkable, apart from Charlie screaming at some freshmen, prompting Meeks to jump and drop his newest contraption. History was slightly more eventful, with Charlie somehow managing to get every single date wrong, but also naming the historical figures they were learning about extremely accurately. Todd knew Charlie pretended to be dumb for the joke, but he also knew Charlie was one of Welton's brightest students.

At the end of the day was Todd's favourite subject, English. He didn't know how to feel about Keating for their first few lessons, he'd never had such an idiosyncratic and peculiar teacher in his life. Balincrest was less traditional than Welton, but such an unconventional teacher would be laughed out before the second period began. Keating had made the class write their own poetry, and read it out to the class. Todd had spent weeks perfecting his poem and learning it, but when it came time to read it, he panicked and said he didn't write a poem. He recited a different poem, one that he thought of on the spot, and although he'd had one of the worst panic attacks in his life, the look on Neil's face was priceless that day. Todd would recite as many poems as he had to, just to see the way Neil looked at him as if he hung the moon and the stars. However, Keating quickly became Todd's favourite teacher, mostly due to his love of Whitman.

Today, however, they were reciting scenes from Shakespeare, specifically Act 1 of Hamlet. Todd really didn't want to perform in front of his class, but of course, Keating made him read the lines for Franciso.

Todd hated saying anything in front of his class, he knew his voice would begin to shake, his palms would get sweaty and his heart rate would begin to skyrocket. Things did seem to be a little easier when the Poets were with him, though. Neil had chosen to volunteer to read the lines of Horatio, Knox and Charlie had been chosen to read for the other characters. Todd was still scared, so much that he thought he would've thrown up, but the little encouraging nod from Neil seemed to ease that.

After awkwardly stumbling through his lines, getting a full Shakespearen performance from Neil and Knox, with Charlie interrupting every few moments, they had moved on to analysing the text.

"So, does anyone have any ideas on the first few lines? Come on, it doesn't matter how stupid it is, unless it's about what you're having for dinner tonight!" Keating exclaimed, eyeing up all his students, "Todd, what about you? What's going on in that poetic mind of yours?"

"More public speaking," Todd thought. He looked over the lines again before starting "Well, it starts off with a question, perhaps that's showing the uncertainty? And then it says 'long live the king' which is quite ironic, really?"

"Are you asking me or telling me, son?"

"S-sorry."

"No need for apologies, Tood. Your ideas were wonderful. Has anyone got any other interpretations?"

"I agree with Todd," a voice from the back said. Neil. "I think it shows the theme of uncertainty felt by the people."

"Excellent!" Keating beamed widely at both Neil and Todd, "Now I want you to work in small groups, or pairs, and try to analyse the rest of this scene. Come on! We haven't got all day!"

Neil immediately got up and walked over to where Todd was sitting at the front of the classroom.

"Hey! I feel like I haven't really spoken to you at all today!" Neil said, studying Todd's face.

“Umm, yeah. I guess we havent.” Todd replied, looking away from Neils prying eyes.

“There’s a dead poets meeting later today, Dalton said something about it at lunch. You’re coming, aren’t you?”

“S-sure, I’ll go, but I’m not reading anything.”
“That’s alright, I like you just being there, it’s a calming presence in the hurricane that is Cameron interacting with Charlie.” He shook his head at his friends across the classroom, again arguing about some insignificant detail.

“We should get on with this, there's a lot to cover,”

****

My darling,

I don’t have words to describe you anymore, so here’s a poem:

I don’t know if the nights are lonely without you
Lines filled with empty promises that you never said
Smoke fills up my room, but I’m staying right here
You once asked if I believed
I told you no
I don’t believe in anything
But you

Please, don’t judge me too harshly. I’m no Whitman. You said I was a calming presence today, but I think that's a more accurate description of you.

Yours until the stars no longer burn,
T.A.

Chapter End Notes

pls dont judge my poem, im no todd anderson
i love seeing all your comments/kudos it honestly makes my day !!
check out my tiktok: spidey.lana (i met rsl :o)
as always, stay safe and have fun,

- L

Chapter 4: you get me closer to god

Chapter Notes

THANK YOU FOR ALL YOUR COMMENTS/KUDOS <3
slight knarlie cause i couldnt help myself :(
this chapter was a bitch to write, and its def not my favourite, but i hope you all enjoy!!
how much of a slow burn do you guys want this to be? lmk !!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The time was 11pm, and the Poets were heading out to their cave. It had started raining a few hours ago, and the clouds still gave no sign of letting up by the time the boys had walked the short distance to the cave. Neil was carrying the precious book underneath his coat, Charlie and Knox were walking together in front (both of them getting absolutely drenched, but neither seemed to care), whilst the rest of the poets hung back slightly, not wanting to brave the harsh conditions.

By the time they had gotten to the cave, attempted to start a fire, and tripped over more rocks than ever before, they were soaked to the bone. Charlie had, of course, stolen a couple bottles of his fathers whiskey, claiming that “he wouldn’t even notice”. Todd hadn’t really been drunk before, he’d had a couple of sips of wine (and one shot of vodka) at a family party a few years ago. It was safe to say he was nervous, he didn’t like losing control of his actions, and there was no telling what he was going to do when drunk.

Charlie was excitedly passing around the bottle before Neil cut him off, “No drinking before I read the opening passage. We need to read at least some poetry before you use this as an excuse to drink.” Neil shook his head in mock disdain, but his small hidden smile gave it away.

After reading the opening statement, he offered the book to Charlie, who immediately flipped to the Whitman section, “This one’s by our dear uncle, Mr Whitman,
She owns the fine house by the rise of the bank
She hides handsome and richly drest aft the blinds of the window
Which of the young men does she like the best?
Ah, the homeliest of them is beautiful to her
Where are you off to, lady? for I see you,
You splash in the water there, yet stay stock still in your room.

Dancing and laughing along the beach came the twenty-ninth bather, The rest did not see her, but she saw them and loved them"

Todd did not miss the sly look he sent to Knox.

"There, I think that's enough poetry for now. So, anyone up for a drink?" Charlie said, grinning like he always did and holding one of the bottles up to his face.

"Why not?" Meeks said, taking the bottle from Charlie and opening it with ease. He took a sip, almost choking "My God, that's awful."

Neil was the next one, before passing it onto Todd, who, like Meeks, choked on the harsh flavour hitting his throat.

After that, things started to become a little blurry. All Todd could remember was a lot of laughter and someone suggesting a game of Truth or Dare. By the time Todd got asked the dreaded question, he'd had far too much to drink in far too little time.

"Todd, truth or dare?"

"Umm, truth?" He responded, slurring his words slightly and giggling at the end.

"Would you rather perform a play, or read one of your poems to the crowd?"

"Is Neil in the play?" Todd asked, fully seriously.

"Of course he'd ask that," Charlie laughed out, lighting a cigarette.

"I guess I would read a poem, maybe. I don't know, is neither an option?"

Neil was looking at him again, in a slightly drunken haze. He didn't like drinking, it reminded him of his mother, so he'd only had a few sips of the drink. He was only slightly tipsy, drunk enough to gain that bit of confidence he didn't really need, but sober enough to stay in control of his actions.

Neil stood up and offered his hand to Knox, "Care for a dance, fine sir?". He started dancing around the cave, bumping into everything and everyone. Knox looked slightly scared, but still held his hand and joined his strange dance.

The rest of the Poets watched for a moment, before deciding to join

them in this dance. Neil made his way over to Todd, leaning down and whispering “I would have asked you, but I'm not too sure if you’d have appreciated that.” He was close, like really close. So close Todd could have moved his head slightly, and kissed him.

Not that he did, of course, but he took Neil’s hand and started slow dancing. The cave was already full of teenage boys dancing up and down and singing songs they didn’t really know the lyrics to, so the added challenge of slow dancing did not help anyone. Not that they cared.

Suddenly, Neil grabbed Todd’s hand and ran outside. There was a light in his eye again, the one Todd only saw when they were with the Poets. It was still raining, but not as heavily. The combination of bad eyesight, far too much whiskey and the dark forest floor did not help either of the boys in keeping their balance, both of them were falling over. Todd was almost completely leaning on Neil, holding his arm for balance.

“You’re so drunk, aren’t you?” Neil said, looking down at Todd and giggling at the sight.

“Mmmm, just a little bit,”

“You’re wasted. Who would’ve thought Todd Anderson would be in this situation?”

“Charlie, probably,”

“You’re not wrong there, buddy,”

“Cmon Neil! Let’s go down to the dock, we can practice lines or whatever,”

“Todd, darling, I’m not in a play right now. I haven’t got any lines to practice,”

“Umm, Romeo Romeo, wherefore art thou Romeo?” Todd tried to joke, but fell flat on his ass because he tripped over a stick on the grass.

They were at the dock now, looking at the serene water. Todd was smiling at nothing in particular, and Neil was staring at him. He’d never seen Todd look so happy and carefree.

“You look happy,”

“I am happy,” Todd retorted.

“Why?”

“Why am I happy? Or why am I here with you? Cause, I’m gonna be honest Neil, I’m not too sure why I’m here instead of half asleep in my room,”

“Our room. But, yeah, why are you happy?”

“Cause I’m with you, and the Poets I guess. I mean, it’s nice being with you guys, it feels like I have friends.”

“You do have friends, you have me at least,”

The sun was already beginning to rise, and the two boys were standing right next to each other, Todd still leaning on Neil. They were close again, unbearably so. Todd was staring at him, he looked beautiful in the early morning light, his cheeks were lightly stained red and his lips were parted slightly. Todd took a step back, clearing his throat. He didn’t want to do something he’d regret.

“I don’t think I could’ve imagined it,” Todd started, “Y’know, back at Balincrest. Having friends seemed like something out of a book. You guys are different.”

“Cmon Todd, let’s get you home, yeah?”

He placed his hand on Todd’s waist, gently leading him down the dock. The other Poets were nowhere to be seen as Neil opened the door to the dorm building. Todd thought that for such an expensive school, they’d have better security. All the doors seemed to be unlocked.

“Neil, I’m tired,”

“I’m sure you are,”

He opened the door to their room, gently placing Todd on his bed before grabbing some clothes for him to wear.

“Todd, please get changed,” Neil pleaded slightly.

“Do I have to?”
“I’d like it if you did, Anderson,”

“Well then!”

After struggling to put on his pajamas, Todd layed down in his bed, but not before grabbing his notebook.
****
Dearest, Darling,

You called me ‘Darling’
I think I’m in love with you, I wanna kiss you. I really wanna kiss you.

Why don’t you love me back?

Love from,
T.A.
****

“Good night, Todd. I hope your hangover isn’t too bad,”

“G’night Neil”

And if someone said ‘I Love You’, the other person pretended not to notice.

Chapter End Notes

yikes!! anyways the ending of this chapter isnt my fav (writers block has been kicking my ass lately)
idk how to write drunk people as you can tell
if anyone wants to talk add my tiktok: spidey.lana
as always, stay safe and have fun,
- L <3

Chapter 5: you know this moment, dont you?

Chapter Notes

im sorry for this one guys <3 i hope you enjoy !!
slightly heartbreaking conversation (+knarlie cause i really cant stop myself)
this chapter is exactly 2k words btw

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The first thing Todd noticed when he woke up was his pounding headache, the second thing being the extreme wave of nausea. The third thing, however, was a glass of water on his nightstand. The water was next to a note and a couple of pills, which Todd took without a care for what they were. The note read:

Have this, it'll help. Gone to town. I'll be back soon.
- N

Todd stood up, disregarding the immense feeling of sickness he felt, and tucked the note into his favourite red notebook. He checked his watch, 9:33. Thank God it was a weekend.

As soon as he opened his door, heading for the bathroom, he was greeted with the sight of his friend. Charlie looked annoyingly well rested for someone that had been up until the early morning. His hair was carefully styled, his clothes looked freshly washed and far better than they usually looked. He showed absolutely no sign of being even slightly hungover. "Damn Anderson, you look like shit. I'm giving you 10 minutes, we need to work on this stupid project," he said.

"Just go in my room and start it, I won't be that long," Todd replied, trying (and failing) to hide his surprise that Charlie actually wanted to get work done.

"Right. If you take even a second longer I'm bursting the door open to the showers and dragging you out. I don't care how naked you are."

"Okay, what the fuck. Look, just go in there and start doing something. I don't really care,"

"Cranky, aren't we?"

"I have the world's worst headache, and I smell like I just lost a fight

with a bar."

Before Charlie could respond, Todd made his way down the hall to the bathroom. He stepped into the shower, the ice cold water hitting his face and making him shudder. He tried to make it seem refreshing, like the water was washing away his memories from last night, but instead all he could feel was the coldness chilling him to the bone.

After that, Todd changed into his favourite navy blue sweater, the one his Grandma knitted him before she passed. He loved this sweater, it was one of the only things he owned that was actually his, rather than being passed down from Jeffery. His Grandma was the only one that listened to what he had to say, no matter how inconsequential it was.

He brushed his teeth and combed his hair flat, or as flat as he could get it, before walking back down to his dorm. He opened the door to find Neil and Charlie sitting on his bed, excitedly talking about something.

"Hey! I was gonna wake you but I thought you needed the sleep. I got you something from town. I remember you said that you liked this book," Neil stood up, grabbing a bag and passing it to Todd with a barely concealed smile.

"Oh, you didn't have to get me anything. Thank you, I mean. This is really nice," Todd opened the bag, seeing a brown book with gold lettering reading 'The Great Gatsby'.

"So…?"

"Neil, this is the best thing I've ever gotten. Thank you, seriously. I love it,"

"It's no problem, really. I saw it in a thrift shop and thought of you."

He was thinking about Todd? He had walked into a store, probably just mindless wondering, saw something and thought of Todd. This was his favourite book, he'd mentioned it once to Neil on a walk around the lake. And he remembered.

Charlie decided to interject Todd's train of thought, "Are we actually gonna do this project? Or are you two just gonna stand there?"

Neil gave Todd one more heart-breaking smile, before saying "There's a new play going on at Henley this year, Hamlet. I might audition for it."

Charlie looked at Neil in disbelief, they all knew what happened last time Neil participated in a play, and there was no telling what might happen this time. Todd looked slightly shocked, Neil had barely mentioned acting after that night, and now he wanted to auditon?

“Well you two don’t need to look so shocked. Auditions are in two weeks.” Neil said, slightly disappointed in his friends' less than excited reactions, “I’m gonna go to the roof and practice my lines, join me after you finish this.”

And with that, he picked up a small stack of paper, a scene from Hamlet Todd guessed, and left the room.

Charlie was the first one to break silence after a short uncomfortable silence, “Right, anyway what’s our topic for this project?”

“American revolution. I told you this like, not even three days ago.”

“I wasn’t paying attention!”

“Yeah I can tell!” Todd said, mocking his scandalized tone.

“Get me my book from my bag, will you?”

“Get it yourself, I just need to get one of my textbooks.”

They worked in silence after that, it wasn’t uncomfortable though. Occasionally, Charlie broke the silence by asking a question about the work. Todd was just feeling grateful that they didn’t have to present it. These quiet moments gave him time to think, Charlie wasn’t that loud, obnoxious confident guy he always pretended to be. He could be quiet, and he was far smarter than most of the people in his class. Todd took this time to write to Neil, like he always did.
****
Neil,

I’m not sure about how I feel with you trying out for the play. If it makes you happy, please, do it. You need more happiness in your life. Some of my favourite memories of us are the nights we went to the roof or the docks and practiced those lines. You told me to say the lines with more confidence, and I tried to. I really did. Did you know you’re my favourite actor? I think I’ve already told you that. Promise me it won’t end like last time.

It scared me far more than I’d like to admit, but if you ever disappear on me again, I swear I’ll search the ends of the world for you. And if I

couldn't find you, I would do it again until I could. I do sit and wonder about what happened that night. What happened that was so bad you couldn't tell me? Does anyone know?

You bought me a book today, my favourite book. It was actually one of the first books I read. I found it on my grandmother's bookshelf one day and decided to read it. I relate to Gastby more than the usual guy, I guess. The book is stunning, by the way, and I don't even think I'm biased. Thank you. Next time I'm in town I'll buy you all the Shakespeare plays I can find, and I don't even think that will come close to how you've made me feel today. I mentioned my favourite book to you once, and you remembered. Words cannot describe how in love I am with you.

Love,
T.A.
****
"Whats going on with you and Neil?" Charlie asked, subtle as ever.

"What do you mean? There's nothing with me and Neil?" Todd was a bad liar.

"Todd, I'm not gonna judge you, okay? You can tell me, I'm not blind. I can see there's something going on," He was scarily sincere, and Todd had never seen him be this serious.

"What's going on with you and Knox, huh?" Todd was trying everything to shift the conversation away from him and Neil. He knew what this meant, if he shared his feelings. All his worst fears would come true at once, and this was Neils best friend. He'd have to admit it. He'd have to admit he was gay. Todd couldn't do that.

"If I tell you what's going on with me and Knox, you'll tell me what's going on with you and Neil?"

"I guess."

"Alright then. Me and Knox, we're not exactly dating. He likes Chris. I don't know what we are, we just occasionally kiss and stuff. It's not like he's gay." Charlie had a sad smile on his face, like he was trying to convince himself of this.

Todd could sympathize, he knew how hard it was. He knew the feeling of pain when you couldn't have the one person you wanted. He knew that no matter how many seconds passed, the crushing fear of never being loved did not get erased.

“And, y-you want that with him? A relationship, I mean,” Todd asked, in a quiet voice, noticing the tears in Charlie’s eyes.

“Yeah. Yeah, I do. Fuck, I want him to love me the way he loves Chris.”

“Same with Neil.” Well, Todd thought, it's out there now. He prepared himself for the pain and hate he knew wasn’t coming.

“What?”

“Same with Neil. I’m in love with him. It’s not like we can ever be together,”

“Great. I guess we’re just unlovable bachelors then,” Charlie tried to joke, but it just fell flat.

Little did they know, Todd wanted to be in Charlie’s position. He didn’t care if they couldn’t be together, or if Neil was in love with a girl. He just wanted to kiss him, to hold him, to be there for him in ways that no one else was. Todd just wanted that closeness that he had never felt before. Charlie, however, wanted to be in Todd’s position. Seeing Knox talk about how beautiful Chris was, when a few hours ago he’d been in Charlie’s arms, hurt in a way no one could describe. It was better, he thought, to look at Knox from a distance, and not get himself involved in any way. Because that’s all it was really, they could never be in love. Knox would never love Charlie the way he could love Chris.

They sat for a moment, realising their feelings were now out in the open. “Don’t tell Neil, please.” Todd found himself saying.

“No, I wouldn’t do that to you.” Charlie responded, again putting on that charismatic mask, “Though, when you want to talk to me about this, my doors always open,”

“Same for you, of course. I know it feels like you have no one, but you have me,”

They worked in silence after this, occasionally speaking about their project, and which events came first. After another hour, Neil still hadn’t returned, it was now becoming closer to lunch time and Todd still hadn’t had anything to eat.

Charlie left his room not long after, and Todd decided to take up Neil’s offer of joining him on the roof.

He made his way over there, opening the door with pracitsed precision.

“Hey, you,” Neil spoke, smiling at Todd who looked slightly out of place.

“Hi, we’ve finished the project,”

“Charlie didn’t bother you too much, I presume,”

“No, actually it was quite nice working with him. We had a nice talk,”

Something flashed across Neil’s face at the mention of this. Something almost like jealousy “Oh,” he started saying, “That’s good.”

“So, what scene are you rehearsing?” Todd asked, peering over Neil’s shoulder to look at the scene in front of him.

“Hamlet’s monolouge in the first act,” Neil responded.

“Anything I can help with?”

“Not at the moment, but thanks. I’ll take you up on your offer soon.”

“Thanks for the book, by the way. No one's done anything that nice for me in a while.”

“It’s really no problem, think of it as a late Christmas present.”

Todd wanted to ask him about the play, whether it was a good idea to do it. Neil’s father was a looming spirit, there was no knowing what could happen if Neil did this play. Todd was scared for him, but he didn’t know how to ask without causing another argument, like last time. He wouldn’t ask right now, he wasn’t even certain that Neil would audition.

“I’m starving, let’s get something to eat,” Neil said, studying Todd’s face.

“Yeah, let’s”

Chapter End Notes

lmk what you guys think of this :)
i love seeing all your comments/kudos i cant describe how happy it makes me !!
i apologise in advance for the next chapter cause thats gonna be

BRUTAL
love you guys, stay safe and have fun <3
- L

Chapter 6: he was right on time

Chapter Notes

> i was lowkey planning for this to be more angsty but still
> TW: panic attacks
> thank you for all your love and support <3 i appreciate it so much !!
> enjoy !!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Neil,

Thank you.
- T.A.
****
The moment Todd woke up, he could tell something was off. There was nothing inherently wrong, Todd woke up as his usual time and started his day off the same way he always did.

He didn't feel like this often, but when he did, he felt like all the tasks of the day were impossible. He couldn't shake the feeling that something bad would happen. He didn't want to talk to anyone, especially not Neil. He was scared of what the poets

He didn't speak much to Neil in the morning, he didn't really have much of a chance, Neil woke up late and rushed to get ready (much like he always did). They were on the way to breakfast together when Neil asked, "You okay, Todd? You've been a bit quiet this morning."

"I'm fine, Neil. Just didn't get enough sleep," Todd turned to look at his face, Neil's concerned look sending a jolt through his body. He didn't want to burden Neil with how he felt, he didn't even know how he felt himself, and how was he going to put that into words? He didn't know how Neil would react.

They didn't talk at all after that, Neil just decided that Todd would come to him if he needed anything. There was nothing particularly remarkable about breakfast, Charlie was making a mess, Knox and Neil were talking about Romeo and Juliet, Cameron was reading a trigonometry textbook while Meeks and Pitts discussed what parts they'd need for their latest invention. Todd tried to listen, but he just couldn't focus on anything.

He made his way to his first lesson of the day, trigonometry. It wasn't particularly difficult, they were just going through their last exams (Todd somehow managed to get a B).

It was boring, much like the rest of his lessons. Nothing happened for the rest of the day, not until English.

Todd usually loved English, he loved the books, he loved his class and he loved Keating. However, he wasn't sure he could go through it today without running out of the class. Keating would usually force Todd to speak out loud, and he couldn't do that today. They were meant to be reciting poetry today, specifically Shakespeare's sonnets. Todd had prepared a sonnet, in case he was asked to speak, but he really didn't feel like speaking in front of his whole class.

After attendance, Keating looked around the classroom and asked "So, students, which of you would like to recite your sonnet first. No need to be scared, of course, I'm sure you've all chosen well," He scanned the class again, eyes locking onto Todd with determination.

"I'll go first!" Charlie spoke, briefly cutting Todd off before he could completely spiral.

He stood in front of the class with his usual confidence. Todd wasn't paying any attention to his poem, rather focusing on whether he would have to recite or not.

After Charlie was done, Neil volunteered to go. He looked truly beautiful upon the stage, like he was meant to be there. Todd thought that Neil was born to be an actor. He would make a good doctor, of course, but his pure talent shouldn't be wasted. Todd looked up at Neil, making him briefly forget his own problems.

Neil stepped down from the makeshift stage, and Keating scanned the class again. Some more people wanted to volunteer (Knox, Meeks and some students that Todd didn't even know the names of) but Keating eye's landed on Todd with that glint of determination again.

No.

He couldn't.

He couldn't do this.

"Todd, what about you? I'm sure you have a fantastic sonnet for us," Keating smiled down at Todd. It was meant to be comforting, but

Todd felt nothing but discomfort.

“I-I didn’t do it,” Todd stuttered out, trying not to pay attention to his classmates burning stares.

“I have a book here, chose one at random,”

“O-Okay.” There was no getting out of this now. He didnt have a choice.

Todd stood up, shaking like the leaves outside. He walked over to the stage, opening the book as steadily as he could.

“S-Shall I compare thee t-to a s-summer’s day
Thou a-art more lovely a-and more t-temperate-”

Fuck. He really couldn’t do this.

He put the book back on Keating’s desk before walking out the room, not taking any of his things.

He couldn’t breathe. He ran to his dorm room, slamming the door shut and falling onto the floor. He hated this. He still couldn’t breathe. Fuck, he’d embarrassed himself in front of his class, and the other Poets.

He knew the anxiety would never leave him, but he was doing so well, he hadn’t had a panic attack in so long. Why? Why now?

In.

Out.

In.

Out.

He didn’t know how long he was sitting there for before the door opened, revealing Neil standing there and looking worried. “Shit, Todd, are you okay? What happened?”

“I-I don’t?”

Neil dropped to the floor, sitting across from Todd. He pried Todd’s hands away from his face, holding them tightly.

“Okay, Todd, can you copy my breathing?”

Todd didn't say much, but he nodded along. They stayed like that for a while, Neil holding his hands tightly, attempting to ground him. Todd was trying to copy his breathing pattern, making an effort to breathe normally and not die.

"Good. I'm here for you, okay? Let me know if you want me to leave or anything,"

"Don't. Please."

Todd wasn't speaking much, but at least it was something. He didn't want Neil seeing him like this, but he didn't want him to leave either. At least he was breathing normally now.

"Todd?" Neil started, "Wanna tell me what happened in Keating's class today?"

He shook his head, he wasn't ready to talk about that yet.

"Wanna take a walk around the lake?"

Without speaking, Todd got up, still holding Neil's hands.

"Guess that's a yes then. I got your stuff from Keating's, by the way," Neil said.

"Thanks,"

"It's no problem, really."

Neil dropped Todd's hands, putting on his jacket. Neil opened the door for Todd, letting him walk through before following. It was late now, it was still light out but there weren't a lot of people outside.They walked over to the lake in complete silence.

They sat down on the edge of the dock, Neil setting down his jacket for the both of them to sit on.

"Todd, I don't want to push you. But can you tell me what happened, I've never seen you act like that,"
"It's just," Todd started, "I don't know. When I woke up, I kinda felt like everything was off. Keating sorta set that off, in a way. You know I don't like public speaking, and, I don't know, I just couldn't do it today."

"Oh, I knew you were a bit off today, but I didn't know how to ask."

“You did ask. You asked this morning.”

“Yeah, but I should’ve pressed a bit more.”

“What, so I could’ve just run out on you?” Todd joked, trying to lighten the conversation.

Neil laughed, “No, but I’m sorry about that. Next time you tell me when you’re feeling off, or else,”

“Or else what?”

“Not sure. Haven’t thought that far ahead.”

They both laughed, easing some of the tension. Neil made everyone in the room light up, when someone was feeling sad, he’d be the first person to make them laugh again.

“Can you explain what this anxiety thing is?” Neil asked, “I want to help you more.”

“I can’t explain it. It sorta feels like everything is too scary, in a way,”

“Oh,”

“Oh.”

“Doesn’t sound fun.”

“It really isn’t.”

The conversation died out, but they still sat down, in comfortable silence. Todd stood up suddenly, Neil looking up at him.

“Where are you going?” Neil asked, standing up.

Unexpectedly, Todd wrapped his arms around Neil, hugging him. Todd rested his head on Neil’s shoulder, while Neil reciprocated the hug. Neil was trying to squeeze out all Todd’s worries and anxieties. It was nice, being loved like that.

They stayed like that for a moment, before Todd regained his composure and stepped back. Neil looked slightly sad, but his eyes quickly melted into that ‘deer-in-headlights’ expression he often had with Todd.

“S-Sorry,” Todd stayed, staring down at the floor as if it personally

offended him.
“No, don’t be. It was nice, really nice.”

Todd just smiled at Neil, not knowing how to react.

“C’mon,” Todd said, “Let’s go back to our dorm, it’s getting cold.”

Neil put his jacket back on, and began walking back to their dorm in silence again. For some reason, it had become an unwritten rule that when they talked at the dock, on the way back (and the way there) they didn’t utter a word. As soon as they walked into the building, they were approached by Keating.

“Good evening, gentlemen. Mr Anderson, may I speak with you?” Keating inquired.

Neil looked at Todd with a worried expression, not knowing what this conversation could mean.

“Um, sure.” Todd replied, walking towards Keating. He said to Neil, “I’ll meet you back at our dorm, okay?”

Neil walked away, looking back at his teacher and his friend.

“Todd. I’d like to apologise,” Keating started, “I shouldn’t have pushed you. You didn’t want to speak, and I shouldn’t have forced you. Next time, please tell me when you don’t feel like speaking.”

“T-There’s no need to apologise, but thank you.”

“I know it’s not a Welton tradition to apologise, rather the opposite, but I do sincerely apologise.”

“Don’t worry about that, Sir. I understand you were just trying to push me to do my best,”

Keating smiled warmly, “Come to my office after your lesson tomorrow, I have some books I think you might like.”

Todd was slightly taken aback, “Thank you? I appreciate it.”

“Good night, Todd. And tell Neil I said good night to him too.”

“I will, thank you again.”

Keating smiled again, walking back to his office.

Todd walked to his dorm, smiling to himself despite the day's activities. He was grateful to Neil, he'd been there when Todd needed him most.

Chapter End Notes

hope you all enjoyed that <3
unfortunately i wont be posting for a few days, as i have SO MUCH college work to do + i really need to find a job
i will start writing the next chapter next week, but dont expect it to be too long <3
stay safe and have fun my loves !!
- L

Chapter 7: until the night falls

Chapter Notes

angst !!
this is not my best work, most of this is very rushed and i have so many missing assignments !!
some of this was written on a calculator (i honestly wish i was kidding)
thank you for all your kudos/comments <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

My dear,

So, you're Hamlet now? I must say you look good in a suit. I'm definitely not complaining about the costume.

However, I want to ask something. Nevermind, it'll just end badly. I suppose I'll ask you another day. No point in writing it down here.

I love you,
T. A.

It was a Saturday morning, and the boys were already up and practising lines. It was cold, so cold that Todd was convinced he would get hypothermia. Again. Even though it was freezing, Todd didn't mind the weather conditions when he was with Neil.

Todd was reading for Ophelia, whilst Neil was reading for Hamlet. Neil didn't exactly know who he wanted to audition for yet, but he knew that he wanted to audition, and nothing Todd could say would change that.

Neil read, "Ha, are you honest?"

Todd searched for his line, "My lord?"

"Are you fair?"

"What means your lordship?" Todd read, slightly confused about what the lines meant.

"That if you be honest and fair, your honesty should admit no discourse to your beauty"

“Could beauty, my lord, have better commerce with honesty?”

Neil transformed whilst he was acting. He was no longer Neil, but Prince Hamlet.

“I’m confused,” Todd said, frowning down at his makeshift script.

“What are you confused about, Ophelia?” Neil smiled at his own dumb joke.

Todd was now frowing at Neil, “These lines, I don’t get them. What’s he trying to say?”

“What makes you think I’d know?”

“You’re meant to know Shakespeare, you are an actor.”

“And you’re meant to be a writer!” Neil walked over to Todd, standing behind him and pointing over his shoulder, “So, I think that he’s saying beauty corrupts honesty.”

“But, does it?”

“Maybe, I guess Shakespeare thought so”

Todd didn’t respond, instead thinking about their close proximity. Before he could say anything, Neil took a step back and flipped through his script, trying to find another scene he could rehearse.

“Neil?” Todd began to ask, “Can I ask you something?”

“Yeah. Sure” Neil looked at him slightly concernedly.
“Nevermind, it’s nothing,” Todd said, looking away from Neil. Maybe another time.

****

“Neil? Uhm can I talk to you about the play?” Todd asked, sitting on his bed.

He decided that he wanted to ask Neil about the play, to ask him what his father would say. He was scared, to say the least, last time they’d gotten into a bit of an argument and it had left Todd anxious for the next few days.

“Yeah, of course!” Neil said excitedly, “The auditions are next week, by the way.”

“Oh cool. That’s cool,” Todd stated, staring at the floor. Again.

“What did you wanna ask?” Neil was now looking at Todd with that deer-in-headlights look again from across their beds.

“You know the play a few months ago? I just wanted to ask if you think this was the best idea?” Todd trailed off at the end, barely looking at Neil.

“What do you mean by that, Todd?” Neil said, losing that calm and playful tone and replacing it with something far more terrifying.

“I just mean that last time you did a play, I found you crying in our room,you still haven’t told me why. Then at the play your father took you away and none of us saw you for weeks!”

“Look, I get you’re concerned, but it’s my life!” Neil began to raise his voice slightly.

“And I get that, but I don’t want you to leave again,”

“Oh, so that’s what this is?” Neil stood up from his bed, beginning to tower over Todd, “You just don’t wanna be alone?”

“No! Of course not!” Todd was lying slightly, but Neil didn’t need to know that, “But what will your father do? He won’t let you do another play, you saw how angry he was last time!”

“I don’t care about that, alright? I really wanna do this, nothing you can say is gonna stop me, so you either support me or you don’t,”

“Neil, listen, I support you. But I don’t want to see you like that again!”

“Jesus Christ, it won’t be like that again. Do you not get it? My father won’t find out again!” Neil was properly shouting now, losing all the kindness he previously had.

Todd was scared. Really scared. He’d never seen Neil so angry, not even last time they’d had an argument. Todd was also becoming increasingly angry, Neil was refusing to listen to his point of view. But Todd wasn’t shouting, he didn’t want the entirety of Welton to hear their argument.
“You know what?” Neil began, with that fake calmness, “I’m not arguing with you about this. I’m doing this play, with or without you. If my father finds out, maybe I’ll just go to that stupid military

school.”

Military school? When had Neil ever mentioned anything about military school?

Todd was suddenly snapped back to reality, his anger dissipating into something more like sad curiosity.

“What do you mean military school? Does your father want to send you there?” Todd asked.

“Forget it.” Neil said, before walking out the dorm and slamming the door shut.

Todd didn’t know what to do. Neil was very clearly annoyed with Todd, he’d probably gone to their friends and was now venting about how unfair Todd was being. He wasn’t trying to be unfair, he just really didn’t want to see Neil like that again. Or not see Neil again.

Todd rolled off his bed, halfway to the door before sinking to the floor. He began crying, those quiet tears that he was so accustomed to. He didn’t know how long he sat on the floor crying, all he knew was that when he looked back up, Neil still wasn’t there.

Todd decided to distract himself by doing some of his homework. Not that it actually distracted him, he found himself reading the same passage of the textbook over and over again. He hated this. He hated this so much. He didn’t want to make Neil mad, he just wanted him to understand his point of view.

Suddenly there was a knock at his door, Todd immediately knew it wasn’t Neil. He didn’t knock. Todd opened the door, revealing the figure of Charlie Dalton.

“Charlie?” Todd said, “What are you doing here?”

Before answering, Charlie pushed his way into the room. He was scarily calm, he didn’t seem angry (Todd was convinced that Charlie was going to punch him in the jaw).

“Don’t worry, I’m not gonna punch you in the jaw. You don’t need to look so scared, I just wanna talk,” Charlie stated, proving Todd's point that he was a mindreader.

Todd didn’t respond, giving Charlie time to contine, “He’s upset, you know.”

“Oh.” Todd stuttered out, feeling slightly stupid that he had nothing better to say.

“How are you feeling, Todd?” Charlie asked, tipping his head to the side and looking at Todd.

“I don’t know. He just started shouting at me, it scared me I guess. I’ve never seen him like that.”

“He didn’t mean it.” Charlie rapidly said, trying to dispel all of Todd’s fears.

“I didn’t mean to upset him. Believe me Charlie, that’s the last thing I want to do.”

“Oh, I know,” Charlie smirked, “He’s in the cave, if you wanted to speak with him.”

“Why’s he there?” Todd asked skeptically.

“How on earth would I know? He went to my dorm for a bit, told me he was going to the cave.”

“And you didn’t ask why?!” Todd asked, now getting very worried for Neil’s safety, “It’s getting late, what time’s he coming back?

“Didn’t have time to ask. He was out the door before I said bye. Give him some time though, I don’t think he’s your biggest fan at the moment.” Charlie winced slightly at the statement, attempting to joke through the uncomfortable conversation.

“Yeah, I’m not surprised. I just really don’t want him taken away again. Oh, and did he mention anything to you about military school?”

Charlie looked at Todd as if he was speaking a foreign language, “Military school? No, never. I’m guessing his father wants to send him there.”

“I thought so too. He kinda freaked when I asked. Left without saying anything.”

“He does that. I’m also scared for him, but I think you knew that already.”

“Oh.” Todd said again.

Charlie stood up from his chair, smiled at Todd and then left the room. It gave Todd time to think, he felt more validated now, he wasn't the only one who thought this play was bad for Neil. But if it made Neil happy, if it gave him back the spark he needed, how bad could it possibly be? Todd wanted to see Neil happy more than anything, he just hoped it wouldn't end badly.

If his father didn't find out, surely this could only be good?

Todd was done waiting, it was dark outside, where was Neil?

He walked out the door before seeing a very familiar figure down the hallway.

God, Todd needed to fix this mess he'd made.

Chapter End Notes

> your comments almost made me cry on the train this morning, i wasnt expecting this fic to get as much support as it has :)
> i promise the next few chapters will be properly written/edited
> lmk what you guys think, i love you all
> stay safe & have fun
> - L x

Chapter 8: with lovers and friends

Chapter Notes

> sorry for the late update guys, theres been a lot going on & ive had to write/perform a screenplay for my german class (slightly based on dps and anderperry !!)
> i spent a while on this one, and i quite like how it turned out, but let me know if this needs any edits <3
> kudos are very very much appreicated, and comments always make my day !!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It had been a few days since their fight. They had seen eachother, they still shared a room, but now it was filled with awkward silence and half-glances that never seemed to have an explanation. Todd wanted to talk, but he didn't know how, not without making the situation a hundred times worse.

Todd hated this, he just wanted things to go back to how they used to be. Neil was barely in the dorm now, he left only minutes after waking up and didn't come back until light out. Todd missed him, all of him. He missed their trips to the dock, the hours spent practising lines until they were both sure they'd only be dreaming in Shakespeare. Most of all, he missed staring at Neil from across the room and writing about those gorgeous eyes and the way his hair lightly fell over his eyes.

Todd needed to fix things, so he did the only thing he could think of.

He wrote a letter.

****

Neil,

I don't know what else to say except I am sorry. Truly, for the first time I don't know how to write down my thoughts, except to say that I apologise for what I did and what I said.

You're right. Of course you're right, when are you not? It's your life and I can't tell you what to do. You should do this play. You have to.

Take some power away from your father, he can't dictate what it is that you do forever. Whether you're in Welton or some other school

on the other side of the country, just know that I'll be with you wherever you go (if you want me there, of course) and I'll support you with whatever career choice you want.

I acted unfairly, and I was only thinking of myself and how I felt when you left. But you were the one who left, and I should have been thinking of you. Promise me that if you ever feel like leaving, you come to me. And if you can't talk to me, talk to Charlie, Knox, Pitts or Meeks.

I understand if you don't want to be friends with me anymore, and I understand if you want to move rooms away from me. You know where to find me if you want to talk to me, or avoid me.

Yours forever,
T.A.

****

It was late by now, it was already dark outside, and the persistent chatter of boys had faded into the distance. Todd had finished writing the letter and he was debating if he should throw it into the fire, or perhaps throw it off a bridge. Todd sat on his bed for a minute, the tears already pricking at his eyes. He couldn't cry, he wouldn't live it down if Neil or the other Poets saw him in this state.

Unexpectedly, the door opened, and Neil walked into the room. In that split-second, Todd shoved the letter in whatever notebook he was closest to, and quickly looked away from Neil's eyes.

Neil looked slightly happy, it was the happiest he'd looked in the past few days. Todd distantly remembered Neil mentioning something about auditions today. Todd wanted to ask, but he couldn't. He didn't want to risk losing whatever remained of their relationship on another argument.

The old Todd wouldn't have said anything, but he wasn't that guy anymore. And if he was going to fix things, he had to be the one to break the silence."Neil, how'd your audition go?" Todd said, only slightly stuttering.

Neil didn't reply at first, but decided to turn away slightly and busy himself with what seemed to be rearranging his books.

"So now you decide you wanna talk?" Neil said sarcastically, looking over at Todd. When he saw that Todd was on the verge of either

crying or running away (maybe both) his voice softened slightly, “It went well, I think.”

“Good. That’s good.” Todd replied, “Look, I’m sorry. I’m not great at speaking but I have this, it should explain everything.”

Todd reached into the notebook, pulling out the letter. He stood up and walked the short distance to Neil. He handed over the letter before walking out the door far more calmly than he felt.

He wasn’t sure where he was going, except that he just wanted to get out of that room before Neil read that letter.

It was raining outside, Meeks had mentioned something about a storm this morning in biology. Todd wanted to go to the library, but he didn’t particularly want to do much studying at the moment. The next best place was Keating’s classroom, but it was late. Oh well, Todd thought, it was worth a try.

Todd made his way over to Keating’s office, trying his hardest not to think about the letter he’d given to Neil. It didn’t reveal his more romantic feelings, but Todd was scared none the less. Neil was forgiving, Todd knew this, Neil would even forgive a wasp if it stung him, so he would forgive one of his best friends, right?

He was about to knock on the door, but he suddenly felt a hand on his shoulder.

Todd spun around to see Neil standing there. He looked like he’d been crying, any amount of happiness had now left his eyes, and there were fresh tear tracks streaming down his face.

“N-Neil, what happened? What’s wrong? Are you okay?” Todd asked, speaking faster than ever before in an attempt to get all his words out before Neil ran away.

“Yeah. Yeah, I’m fine,” Neil said in a shaky voice, “Your letter, it just…made me think.”

Todd was scared now, slightly frightened about what thoughts Neil now had, “Think about what?”

“Everything. I’ve missed you, Todd. I really really missed you. And you know what? You don’t have to follow me to the ends of the earth or wherever I go, because I’ll be the one following you. I’m gonna be the one that’s there for you. And I swear I won’t leave again, ever. He

has no power over me now," Neil let out a strangled laugh, "He can't hurt me anymore,"

Todd brought his hands up to Neil's face, gently cupping his jaw. Todd gently swept the remaining tears away, "Guess we're following eachother, huh?"

"Always," Neil smiled gently, leaning into the touch, "You have a way with words, you know that?"

"That was probably the worst thing I've ever written. It really wasn't great,"

"That was the worst?!" Neil asked incrediously, "I can't wait to see what the best is,"

"And what makes you think you'll be able to see the best, Perry?"

"Oh, come on. Every time you write, you immediately try to show me and see how I feel about it."

"That might be true," Todd laughed out, the moment of realisation hitting him.

Neil did truly know him better than everyone else, didn't he?

Neil's face was close, so close. If Todd just moved slightly closer, their lips would connect. Todd's hands were still on Neil's face, but when he heard footsteps down the corridor, he dropped his hands and took a step back.

Todd wanted to kiss Neil. He wanted to kiss him more than anything, but they couldn't. Todd didn't even know if Neil felt the same, and they were in public, in a catholic school no less. It was dangerous enough to be seen like this.

They stayed like that for a few more minutes, just staring into eachothers eyes. "So, tell me more about this audition of yours," Todd asked, as Neil slung an arm over his shoulder and began walking towards their dorm.

Chapter End Notes

i hope you enjoyed this chapter !!
the next few chapters will be out shortly, and my update schedule will be more or less regular from now on !!

if you have any suggestions on what to include in this fic, feel free to dm me on tiktok (spidey.lana)
stay safe and have fun my loves !!
- L <3

Chapter 9: and if i may just take your breath away

Chapter Notes

i spent so long writng this but here is the #reveal !! my longest chapter ever
i need to apologise for the emotional rollercoaster this chapter WILL take you on x
TW: self harm, suicide, bad parenting
please read the trigger warnings my loves stay safe !!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was around 2am, and the rain showed no sign of letting up.

It wasn't as if Todd hated the rain, he quite liked it actually, but right now all he wanted to do was sleep. However, the heavy downpour was set on keeping Todd tossing and turning all night.

He got out of bed, throwing the covers off with far more anger than he felt, and decided to go to the library. He shivered as he got up, and decided to put on whatever sweater he found laying on the floor.

By this time, it should've been shut, but the old librarian (some of the Poets had bets on when the man had actually started here, Pitts said that he'd been there longer than Welton had been open) very often forgot to actually lock the door. It worked to his advantage though, the library would be completely empty and he could read whatever poetry took his fancy.

Before he could leave however, he heard a bleary voice ask "Todd? Where're you off to?" It was Neil, of course he'd woken up by Todd's heavy sighing and pattering around the room. Neil seemed to be barely awake, his hair flying in every possible direction on the pillow and the covers pulled up halfway across his face.

"Nowhere," Todd whispered softly, "Just going to the library. Go back to sleep, Neil."

Neil made a quiet sighing noise before barely whispering his reply, "Its late, come back to bed"

"Can't sleep. Rain's keeping me up,"

Neil didn't say anything back at first, but shuffled closer to the wall and patted the space next to him, "Come here then,"

What the fuck.

Was Neil seriously offering to sleep next to him?

"No, Neil. I can't. J-Just go back to sleep, alright?" Todd mumbled, thanking whatever Gods made it dark so Neil couldn't see the blush that had overtaken his face.

"Nah, I'm fully awake now," Neil replied, eyes still firmly shut and his head stil pressed against the pillow.

Todd was about to fully go insane, but he still wondered if he should actually take Neil up on his offer or if this was some messed up stress dream he'd conjoured in his barely awake mind. *Oh well,* he thought, *what's the worst that could happen*.

He walked over to Neil's bed, awkwardly sitting down in the space created. Todd layed down, setting his head down on the pillow next to Neil. By this point, Todd was very quickly falling into some sort of overthinking-induced manic state and was definitely considering running away to the other side of the country.

Todd didn't know if he loved or hated this, he was so close to Neil but he couldn't reach out for him. He couldn't wrap his arms around him, he couldn't kiss the top of his head, he couldn't whisper sweet nothings into the cold night air. Well, he could, he thought, but it wasn't worth ruining their friendship.

"Todd, I can hear you overthinking," Neil mumbled out, "Calm down a bit, yeah?"

In a feeble attempt to help Todd relax, Neil decided to place his hand gently around Todd's waist and pull him into his chest. "Thats my sweater," Neil said dumbly, opening his eyes slightly to peer at Todd,

"Y-Yeah. Sorry, I just grabbed whatever I saw on the floor," Todd hurriedly said, to a slight extent wishising that Neil would just shut up and sleep.

Neil didn't reply, he just pulled Todd closer.

Todd was well and truly questioning if he was hallucinating.

Todd wanted to fight, wanted to pull away and shout that this was wrong. Friends didn't do this, he knew this was crossing some sort of line between friendship and relationship. They shouldn't be doing this. If anyone walked in and saw them, they would both be kicked to the edge of society and they would never see each other again.

But he couldn't bring himself to do it. He couldn't bring himself to leave the peaceful half-concious state they were both in.

Neil looked so serene and untrobled, all his features melted away into something much softer. It was nice seeing him like this, Todd felt like the carefully concocted mask Neil constantly wore finally slipped away, revealing the very real Neil Perry that he so dearly loved.

Todd had tried to fight off sleep, wanting to remember this for as long as he could, convincing himself that this one-off occasion would never happen again. But, alas, Neil's comforting presence and reasuring embrace made sure Todd was fast asleep before another minute could pass.

****

The first thing Todd noticed when he woke up was the distinct lack of Neil's company. His jacket was still casually draped over the chair, but his shoes and school bag were missing from their usual hiding spot in the corner. It was nearly lunchtime now, and Todd had yet to actually get out of bed and do the mountains of homework that had already been piling up throughout the dreary week.

Todd had barely noticed that he wasn't in his own bed, choosing instead to fixate on the rather comfortable forest green sweater he was wearing. He stared down at his foliage-like covered arms for a moment, before choosing to slowly take it off.

Todd now felt cursed, in a way. Almost like he'd stolen something that wasn't his, and although Neil hadn't expressed any discomfort, he'd never actually given Todd explicit permission. Again Todd felt like he was crossing some sort of invisible line between what was acceptable as friends and what was against the law.

Todd sat there for another moment, green sweater in hand. He allowed himself to dream for a moment, thinking about what it would be like if he could wear Neil's sweater without worrying what everyone else would say about it. It was stupid, he thought, caring so much about his friend's dumb sweater.

Yeah. His friend's.

Todd got dressed for the day (wearing his own clothes this time), placing the sweater on Neil's bed, praying to all the God's that Neil hadn't mentioned their midnight escapades to the other Poets. It was all too much to explain on a Sunday morning

He walked out the room, not bothering to take anything with him, deciding to see who was in the common room. Todd pretended that he didn't notice Neil by the telephone, quietly speaking to whoever was on the other end. Todd couldn't read Neil's expression right now, his head was turned away from everyone in the room. Neil didn't notice him either, of course, Todd hardly made a sound when he walked into a room.

Todd made his way over to Meeks and Pitts, who were hunched over at the far end of the table and peering at their latest invention, "Hey, Todd!" Pitts exclaimed, startling some poor sixth grader, "We're working on our new radio, feel free to join us!"

"Don't think I'll be much help there," Todd awkwardly laughed out, "But do you mind if I just sit here for a while?"

Meeks smiled at him, "Of course! Knox and Charlie are talking to Stick right now, by the way."

"Stick? Is that his actual name?" Todd asked incredulously.

"I think his name's James? Or Jack maybe, I'm not entirely sure," Pitts answered.

"Who's Neil on the phone to?" Meeks asked, looking at Todd again.

Todd was slightly taken back, "Not sure. I thought you'd know the answer?"

Meeks had chosen this moment to put a wire in the wrong place, causing him to very ungracefully leap out his chair and let out a high-pitched yelp.

However, Todd noticed that Neil was now looking over at their end of the table.

Presumably, Neil said goodbye to the other person, as he now slammed the phone down and walked over to the three of them.

“Hey guys!” Neil said, with such obvious fake enthusiasm it almost made Todd cringe,”What are you all up to?”

“Nothing much,” Meeks answered, “Everything alright with you, Neil?”

Pitts chimed in, “Who were you on the phone to?”

Neil looked rather shocked, as if he hadn’t realised people had seen him, “Doesn’t matter. And, yeah, I’m fine”

Todd saw that mask again, the walls Neil put up to stop people from knowing about his life. It was so unlike the boy Todd had seen last night, that boy seemed to be filled with so many hopes and dreams, whereas now he just seemed like it had all been taken from him. It was clear who he had spoken to, at least to Todd, no one quite took the light from Neil’s eyes like his father.

Neil looked between the three again, glancing over them to see if they saw through his already cracked walls. Maybe Neil didn’t realise, but they’d all known the moment he said hello, his voice dripping with fraudulent happiness.

Todd watched Neil walk away, his jaw clenched so tightly it could break teeth. Todd wanted to run after him, to ask if he was alright and to perhaps shield him from his father’s painful words. But he knew what would happen, Neil would get defensive and it would cause far more harm than good.

If Neil needed space, Todd would give it to him. If he needed a friend’s shoulder to cry on, Todd would be there, ready to say whatever comforting things he could.

After a few minutes (to Todd this felt like hours), he couldn’t bear it any longer.

During the short walk down to their dorm, Todd was preparing a speech in his head, listing all the possible outcomes of Neil’s conversation. Had his father found out about the play? Surely not, Neil hadn’t even gotten the part yet. Had Neil gotten a bad grade in a test? Neil was one of the brightest students in the entirety of Welton, set to rival Todd’s own brother. There was no way Neil could have done anything wrong.

However, nothing could have prepared Todd for what he was about to witness.

Todd opened the door, almost tripping on Neil as he walked into the room.

Neil was sitting on the floor, holding his wrist in an attempt to stop blood from pouring out. There was a blade on the floor, far closer to Neil than Todd would have liked. Neil had tried to cover it up when he noticed Todd entering the room, but his efforts proved to be futile.

“Neil,” Todd started calmly, “What’s going on?”

Todd was scared, far more scared than he’d ever been. Seeing Neil like this was a shock, but he couldn’t imagine how much more frightened and hurt Neil felt.

“I’m sorry. I’m sorry,” Neil repeatedly sobbed out, over and over again, tears falling from his eyes, “Its all my fault I’m so sorry,”

Todd knelt down beside him, “No, Neil, it’s okay. Don’t be sorry, you don’t need to apologise. I need to help you though, can you tell me what happened?”

Todd had his fair share of these ‘incidents’ before, he was no stranger to these. He knew the overwhelming feeling of helplessness before seeing that one object. Seeing Neil on the floor was bringing back far too many memories, but he couldn’t break down, not yet at least. Neil needed him now more than ever.

“M-My father,” Neil cried, unable to finish, “It hurts, Todd. It hurts so bad,”

“I know it hurts, have you got any bandages?” Todd asked, desperately trying to keep that calm tone in his voice.

“Y-You know?” Neil asked, looking up at Todd.

His expression was honestly heartbreaking, Todd had seen him cry of course, but nothing as raw and emotional as this. Neil looked truly broken, almost like he could never be put back together. But the blood was still there, and it had to be cleaned before it caused any more problems.

“Yeah,” Todd breathed out, “I know. Where do you keep the bandages, Neil?”

“Top left corner of m-my closet,”

Todd very quickly stood up, opening the closet door and finding a dark blue box tucked right in the corner. He grabbed the box before taking his place beside Neil again. The box held a small half-empty bottle of anti-septic, some bandages, and a smaller box full of what seemed to be clean razor blades.

“Can I have your arm, please?” Todd asked, trying to get Neil to look at him, “You don’t have to be embarrassed around me, you know that. Just let me do this for you, and then we’ll talk, okay?”

Neil handed his arm out to Todd, vaguely murmuring apologies under his breath.

“Stop apologsing, you have nothing to be sorry for.” Todd comforted.

“It hurts,”

“It’s gonna be alright,”

Todd gently wiped the wounds clean, applying the antiseptic before winding the bandages tightly around Neil’s arms.

Neil’s hands were covered in blood, so Todd took them into his own, cleaning Neil’s hands so very gently that it almost made the latter burst out crying again.

They sat in silence for a few moments, both of them processing what just happened.

“See, it’s all alright now,” Todd stated, “Now, can you tell me a little bit more of what happened?”

Todd wasn’t sure whether Neil would reply or not, he still somewhat expected Neil to go flying out the room at any moment.

“Not here. Please, not here,” Neil quietly said.

“Wanna go to the dock?” Todd offered.

“Rowing practice.” Neil argued, “Can we go to the cave?”

“Alright then, we’ll go to the cave,”

Todd was trying not to be mad at Neil, but it wasn’t going particularly well. Neil had promised him, promised that if he’d ever felt like disappearing, he would come to Todd or one of the other Poets. Todd couldn’t find it in himself to fully be angry with Neil, he knew the

feeling of worthlessness and hatred all too well, he knew how Neil felt there was only one escape.

They made their way to the cave in pure silence, both of them knowing that this conversation would change everything.

Todd noticed how many people were on the grounds today, but no one seemed to be paying attention to them. The other boys were all preoccupied with their fencing, or chess, maybe even their studying, no one else knew what had just unfolded in one particular dorm room.

Neil was walking up ahead, not stopping to look back at Todd once.

****

The cave was cold and damp, not somewhere Todd would have chosen, but he would've gone anywhere if Neil was there.

"I know you don't wanna talk, but I have to know what happened," Todd said gently.

"You're gonna turn me in, aren't you?" Neil asked, sounding upset.

"What? No! Why would I do that?"

"Because you don't want some fucking lunatic as a roomate. I get it, Todd, I really do."

"No, I'm not gonna turn you in to anyone," Todd answered, "But I want to help understand what just happened there,"

"Dad called me,"

"What did he say?" Todd asked tentatively.

"The usual, thinking he can just live through me. We're not well off, not like you or Charlie or Knox or anyone else at that stupid school. He didn't have the chance to go here, as much as he wanted to. Normal people would just suck it up, but not him," Neil ranted, "No, I have to grow up and become a stupid fucking doctor just like he always wanted to be. He said I have to be better, but I can't. I'm doing the best I can and that's not enough."

"You are enough, Neil,"

"No. I'm not. I won't ever be." Neil said, now sounding as if all hope had completely fled.

“You already are, and he’s a fool not to see that,”

“Can I tell you what happened after the play?”

“Of course,”

“I tried to kill myself. I couldn’t live in this world anymore knowing that everything was controlled by him. My death was even gonna be controlled by him,” Neil let out a sad laugh, “Dying by his gun. Indirectly, by his hand.”

Todd was now the one on the verge of tears. Neil, his Neil, had almost left the earth for good and he had no idea. He had to fight the breakdown a little longer. Neil was his life, the very air he breathed, and without him, Todd would have died too. Gone. That’s what Neil could have been. A distant memory Todd thought about, when he was wine-drunk in thirty years reminiscing on his bittersweet school days.

Todd hated that thought, Neil would forever be the love of his life.

“I had no idea, I’m so sorry,” Todd said, not knowing how to say what he truly feeled.

“I missed. Shot the edge of my shoulder.”

“Do you regret it?”

Neil looked around the cave, as if it would have the answer he was looking for, “No,” he replied, “I didn’t want to die, but I don’t want to live under his thumb.”

Todd, not for the first time, was at a complete loss of words. There were so many things he wanted to say, so many things he wanted to do.

“You didn’t deserve that,” Todd replied, “You’re perfect as you are. You’re talented, Neil, and your father is blind. I’m here for you, I told you I am, whatever you decide,”

“That means a lot, Todd.” Neil said, smiling for the first time.

Instead of replying, Todd wrapped his arms around Neil, trying to communicate all the things he left unsaid. Neil seemed to understand, as he held Todd just as tightly.

When they pulled back, Todd took a minute to appreciate how

gorgeous Neil really is. Todd wasn’t sure whether Neil could hear how loudly his heart was beating as he looked at Neil’s face, the way his eyes had almost turned to black, his lips gently parted, his sharp jawline, his adams apple.

Todd pressed forward and Neil leaned in.

There were no regrets now, Todd’s hand was in Neil’s hair, as Neil’s hand went to cup Todd’s face. They kissed tenderly, but with the underlying reckless abandon that neither of them really had before.

Carpe Diem.

Chapter End Notes

yikes !!
writing this at 3am wasn't a good idea im so sorry gang

Chapter 10: my good looking boy

Chapter Notes

> hiiii everyone !! so ik i said my update schedule would be consistent, but ive had some issues both in my personal life and my (uk) collegelife (being in a maths class whilst also doing three essay based subjects isnt for the weak) so this fic hasnt been my priority. that being said, have this pathetic unedited excuse for a chapter as a small apology and i WILL upload a longer chapter next week <3333
> as ive already said, english is far from being my first language so tell me if i make a mistake !!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“I love you.”

They pulled back for a moment, staring aat eachother’s eyes, searching for an explanation for what just happened.

“Neil, you can’t just say something like that.” Todd replied, looking away, knowing that Neil’s expression, whatever it was, would completely break him.

“Why not?” Neil answered, “I love you, Todd. And I think I’ve been in love with you since you stepped into that courtyard on your first day. I was a fool, I still am, *but I love you*.”

Todd let out a broken laugh, “Maybe that’s the most foolish thing you could do,”

“Maybe it is, but I’d be even more foolish to care,”

Todd leaned back, brushing against the damp walls of the cave. This was all he ever wanted, so why was he about to give it up? He had Neil right there, Todd knew that he could say whatever he wanted and Neil would follow. To the ends of the earth.

“Neil, you know what’ll happen if someone finds out,” Todd said,still avoiding eye contact, “You’ll be ruined, we’ll both be. Any prospects of becoming, well, anything, would be thrown out of the window. I couldn’t let myself do that to you,”

“So that’s it then? You kiss me like that, and then what?”

“I’m sorry, I just couldn’t live with myself if I knew I could ruin your life,”

Todd knew what he was doing, he knew that he was breaking Neil’s heart. He could hear it, in the way his voice cracked slightly and every bit of sunshine he radiated seemed to dim.

Neil answered, “No, I’m not leaving until you say you don’t love me. Not until you say you don’t feel the same. You can punch me and call me disgusting, but at least I’ll know how you feel.”

Todd couldn’t lie. The letters, the late night talks, the poems he wrote that always seemed to be about Neil in some way. There was no point in lying, Neil would see right through him anyway. He did love Neil, but love didn’t matter when it could ruin both their lives, love was nothing compared to the hate they would recieve.

“I love you!” Todd shouted suddenly, “God, I love you more than anything, can’t you see that? But you don’t get that this will ruin us, we just can’t.”

Neil smiled, truly smiled. His eyes that seemed to be on the verge of tears cleared up slightly, and for the first time in the past 12 hours, he looked happy.

“Can’t we just give it a try?” Neil asked, “If someone even comes close to finding out, we’ll stop this,”

“Neil-” Todd began, but was quickly cut off.

“No. Don’t overthink this, do you want me or not?”

“I always do,”

“So, that’s a yes?” Neil asked tentatively.

“*Yes.*”

It was all happening so fast, Todd could barely get his head around it. “Does this mean we’re, like, together now?” Todd asked, unable to stop the question from spilling out.

Neil smiled again, taking Todd’s hand in his own, “It means whatever you want it to mean,”

Todd couldn’t quell his fears, but when he felt Neil’s hand holding his, every worry, every anxious thought, seemed to melt away at the

touch. He couldn't help but feel like it was so right, how Neils's hand fit so naturally in his. Almost like it was meant to be.

"Come on, it's getting late. They'll be wondering where we are" Neil said, checking his watch.

Todd leaned in and kissed him, but it was different this time. Todd couldn't quite place why it was different, maybe it was because feelings were revealed, or they both knew every kiss could be their last one.

"I could get used to this, you know," Todd said, tucking a strand of Neil's hair behind his ear, deciding that the consequences were worth it, only if Neil looked at him like that in every lifetime.

Neil laughed, still holding Todd's hand, "What, kissing me senseless?"

"Of course!" Todd joked, hiding his face slightly as he laughed.

"Well, I'm not complaining,"

Todd stood up, his head barely missing the roof of the cave. It was still light outside, but the evening was bringing a slight chill to the air. Todd shivered as he walked outside, Neil immediately noticing and wrapping his scarf around Todd's neck.

"There, now you won't be cold," Neil remarked, appearing to be very excited about returning to their dorm.

"I'm fine, really I am," Todd argued, but Neil had already started walking up ahead.

Annoying guy, Todd thought, *wow, I really do love him.*

They trudged through the forest, Neil walking slightly faster and occasionally warning Todd of a particular branch or bush on the ground (Todd was very accident prone, especially in the forest).

Todd hadn't really thought about this whole 'being with Neil' thing properly until he reached the edge of the forest, where he could see the entire school. He took a minute to think about what this actually meant for him, before getting slightly distracted by seeing Charlie and Knox, completely drenched, walking up the path from the dock with the rest of their rowing team. He wondered what would happen if their school found out. He would be kicked out, of course he would be, but what of his friends?

Would the only friends he'd ever had start to hate him?

And where would he go? All his childhood dreams about studying English in the best colleges and becoming a writer would go, like a puff of smoke, dissipating into the wind.

It was a sin, he knew it was a sin. It had been drilled into him before he could even say the word.

It shouldn't feel so right. But it did.

Neil looked back, a concerned expression on his face, "Are you alright?"

"Yeah," Todd lied, "I'm fine."

Neil clearly didn't accept the answer, but quickly squeezed Todd's hand as a sign of support, before dropping it and taking a few steps away.

They walked in silence after that, neither of them glancing at eachother. Todd didn't mind it at all, he always preferred the silence over meaningless chatter. But it was never meaningless with Neil, he could talk about trigonometry for hours and Todd would still be enraptured.

They'd made it outside the dorm building before, inevitably, being ambushed by a soaking wet Charlie and a slightly damp looking Knox.

"What's happened here?" Neil asked, trying (and failing) to keep a stern tone in his voice.

"Charlie here decided it would be a great idea to go for a swim in the cold lake water, didn't you, Char?" Knox answered, towelling his hair rather aggressively.

Charlie looked at the three of them with a shit-eating grin, "In my defense, practice was getting a bit boring! It happens to the best of us!"

Neil was trying to hide his laughter as Knox angrily stated "You shouldn't have pushed me into the lake! You're so lucky we had Keating today,"

"Aren't I?" Charlie answered, "I'm not sure why you're complaining, my darling Overstreet. You had first dibs on showers."

Todd loved their antics, most of the time, but right now all he wanted to do was pull Neil into their room and spend time with him. They could do anything, really. Whether that was writing, homework, kissing, or something Todd wouldn't dare to say out loud.

"Sorry to interrupt," Todd said, shutting up Charlie and Knox's petty squabbling,"I have some homework and Neil promised to help me,"

"Oh did he?" Charlie smirked, already knowing what this 'homework' actually meant.

Before Todd could answer, Neil grabbed him by the wrist and quite literally spun him into the room. Todd's back was against the wall as Neil placed one hand on his waist and the other reaching behind Todd in order to lock their door.

"So," Neil said, his lips so close to Todd's that they almost connected, "Where were we?"

"I wasn't lying when I said I have homework you need to help me with," Todd replied, kissing Neil gently.

Neil grabbed his face with both hands, kissing him passionately. Todd didn't mind much, he liked when Neil was forward, but he was caught off guard. He leaned away from the touch, before Neil repeated apologies "I'm sorry, Todd. I should've asked if you were okay with that."

"Neil, it's fine. I liked it, but I've never really kissed anyone before," Todd admitted.

Neil looked confused for a split second, but recovered quickly, "Now you have me to teach you," he flirted.

They kissed once more before Todd said, "Okay, no more kissing until you help me with this biology worksheet,"

Neil obliged easily, leading the both of them to his bed. He sat down first, leaving Todd enough room to climb beside him and rest his head on his shoulder. He explained things calmly, going over each of the concepts numerous times before Todd understood them. Neil didn't mind, not at all, he would do anything for Todd if it meant his life was slightly easier.

It was comfortable, painfully so. Todd almost began to worry that this was too good, that this was just a dream.

But Neil's calm voice explaining science terms that Todd barely understood bought him back to reality.

It was real. Everything was.

Chapter End Notes

yikes!! definetly not my fav chapter
i really want to say a quick thank you to everyone who has left comments/kudos, it genuniely means more to me than you can imagine <33
also, if youre from the us (or know how the school/college system works) PLEASE lmk as i want to write a knarlie thing based on that !!
love you lots, stay safe and have fun
- L xx

Chapter 11: and thats the way i loved you

Chapter Notes

hi my loves !! i hope you all enjoy this chapter, and i really appreciate all the love on this fic <3
this isnt super angtsy or fluffy and i wrote half of this a week ago and the other half five minutes ago on the plane, please dont expect a masterpiece !!
comments & kudos are very much appreciated <3

See the end of the chapter for more notes

To my love,

I'm sorry I haven't written to you, Neil. But in all honesty I don't think I've had the time for it. Are you alright? I know that's stupid of me to ask, I've been with you at every waking moment. Not that I mind, of course. I love being with you.

I apologise for my rambling, though it seems I can't control it with you.

I'll start with this: I was scared. I still am, but we'll talk about that later. I really cannot get my thoughts in order, can I? The thought that you might love me back had never crossed my mind, that is until you told me a few days ago. You called me your favourite poet though now it seems I can't put into words how perfect you really are. Seeing you happy gives me reasons to keep living, and I can only dream that it's the same for you. Before Welton, I didn't really have a person. Truthfully, I didn't have any people. I'll be yours as long as you'll have me, darling. I'd give you anything, you could ask for the moon and I'd find a way to bring it to you.

I'm glad you decided to stay here, not with me specifically, but on this planet. I've said it before and I'll say it again, follow your dreams. He can take what he wants, but he can't take that away. He'll try to, he already has, but he didn't succeed. I'm not religious, but I thank God every single day that you're alive. It's difficult, and I won't say I've been in your exact position because I know I've been in the exact opposite. Sometimes I do think we're at such opposite ends of the spectrum, regarding our families, that they almost touch. Always looked at, but never truly seen. Well, not seen in the way we want to be seen, you know? It gets better when I'm with you. That dull aching sadness that never really goes away fades into the background. When everything gets too overwhelming, I look at you and it seems to get better.

Enough of the sappy love confessions, you've heard enough of them recently. This isn't a declaration of my love, rather one of friendship. I want to say something to you, and I'm aware how stupid this sounds considering you will never read these letters. But I couldn't bring myself to stand face to face with you and tell you this. Neil, sweetheart, if someone catches us or if they have any inkling what's going on between us, I'll say it was all my fault. In a way it is my fault, we could have stayed distant roommates, acquaintances who were polite, but never close enough to touch. Not close enough to kiss or hold hands or do anything remotely romantic. I could never bring myself to ruin your future, Neil. I have no future, I'm 17 and I don't have an inkling of what I want to do. You'll look at me and say "English is your passion!" which might very well be true, but is it enough to live on? You are a phenomenal actor, but I know full well it is difficult to get parts. You've told me directors favour those with experience, and you've also mentioned once how pitiful the pay is. How are we to get by on such a small budget? Forgive me, I'm making assumptions.

I've written something. A novel. It isn't good, not yet. A navy officer, controlled by his father and his mother. All he really wants to do is act, he's a fantastic actor but he was forced and manipulated into playing this role he wants no part of. Sounds a bit like you, does it not? Darling, I think you know where I got my inspiration from. I'm not here to make decisions for you, you know I'm not, but you should take control over your own future. You decide, not anyone else.

Anyway, I think I've written enough. Again, I apologise for my rambling, not that you'll read this anyway.

All my love,

T.A.

****

Todd was sitting on the windowsill, reading The Great Gatsby whilst the rain pattered down on the window. Coming from Arizona, Todd wasn't used to much rain. He loved it though, he always found it relaxing. Especially when all his assignments were completed and he was curled up with a good book. Truth be told, he wasn't paying much attention to the book. He was more focused on when Neil would come back.

Neil had left a few hours ago, mumbling quickly about leaving for rehearsals before Todd had fully woken up. The sun was about to set now, and Todd was missing his boyfriend now more than ever.

Todd tried to go back to his book, but he caught himself reading the same paragraph over and over again without really taking anything in. He shut the book indignantly, before throwing it on the floor.

Before he could feel embarrassed and pick it up, Neil walked through the door, completely soaked from the rain.

“Not a good book, I assume?” Neil joked, gently shutting and locking the door.

Todd stood up, looking at Neil with obvious concern, “Jesus, Neil. Did you cycle through a thunderstorm or something? C’mon, get changed before you catch a cold.”

“With the amount of rain out there, my love, it might as well be a storm. Also, I walked” Neil said proudly.

“You walked? In this weather?”

“In my defense, it was nice this morning! Not that you’d know, sleepyhead.”

“Hey!” Todd exclaimed, “It’s not my fault you were all warm and cosy. Please get changed, you’re going to catch a cold, and I refuse to look after you.”

“I’d never get a cold, I know how scared you are of getting sick,”

“Thank you?”

Neil walked over to his closet, pulling out sweatpants and his green sweater. Todd tried his hardest not to look, but he couldn’t help himself from glancing at his gorgeous boyfriend, hair dripping down to his chest.

“Todd, I can feel you looking,” Neil said, still facing away from Todd.

Todd looked away, bending down to pick up the book he threw on the floor, “I’m not looking,” He lied.

Neil laughed, “It’s okay, darling. I really don’t mind.”

Todd didn’t respond, instead choosing to sit down on Neil’s bed. Once Neil was done changing, his clothes haphazardly thrown into their laundry basket, he sat down next to Todd.

“Let’s do something,” Neil suggested, scanning the room for something

they could do.

“How about a game of chess? You could tell me about rehearsals?” Todd asked.

Neil beamed, causing Todd’s heart to skip a beat. “Perfect idea, Mr Anderson. You’ll never guess what happened with the girl playing Ophelia and Polonius,”

“Aren’t they meant to be father and daughter?” Todd asked, laughing slightly.

“I know, right! Where’s your chess set?” Neil said, remembering their previous plans.

“On my shelf, next to the blue and red books.” Todd replied.#

Neil got up and walked over to the shelf, sliding the set out of its spot. However, before he could do much else, he knocked over the unassuming red notebook onto the desk.

He was about to put it back, before noticing his name written a few times on the page.

Todd’s world seemed to stop for a moment, he felt like he was about to lose everything. All his fears were coming true, and he knew there wasn’t much he could say that would amend this situation. It wasn’t exactly wrong, he and Neil were already dating. But this was too much. Letters going back before they had even become friends, feelings sprawled out onto countless pages of writing, the unmistakable declarations of Todd’s love.

It would be too much for Neil, surely it would scare him away? Todd loved too strongly, too deeply. He was too much of everything, but somehow not enough at the same time. God, what would Neil say to him?

“Neil-” Todd started, standing up so fast the blood rushed to his face.

Neil unintentionally started reading the pages, unable to stop himself. After a few seconds he noticed Todd staring at him, looking both scared and heartbroken.

“Todd? W-What is this?” He stuttered out, “Are these love letters written to me?”

Todd couldn’t lie now, there was no mistaking his handwriting and emotions. All he could hope was that Neil would still feel the same after this.

Chapter End Notes

hope yall enjoyed this trainwreck !
let me know about any spelling/grammar mistakes (i dont beta read)
i have a meeting w my mechanics teacher later, wish me luck :(
stay safe and have fun,
- L <3

Chapter 12: starry, starry night

Chapter Notes

a #new chapter?! who wouldve thought!
so much dialouge i might have to start a chatfic soon
lmk if i should make any changes :p
follow me on tiktok for some super duper cool dps/house edits (spidey.lana)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Todd mustered up all the courage he could before saying “I wrote to you. Everyday, practically. I just…I just wasn’t really expecting you to read any.”

“I can see that.”

“I’m sorry, Neil. I understand if this is too much and you don’t wanna be involved with me anymore.” Todd said, bracing himself to hear the words that never came.

Neil frowned slightly “What? No, of course I won’t cut you out of my life,”

“I couldn’t tell you most of what I wrote. Please, I’m so sorry.”

“So you wrote to me instead? Why couldn’t you just tell me? I’m your best friend, even more than that now, but what was so bad you felt like you couldn’t tell me?” Neil questioned, his expression genuinely curious as he finally looked up from the notebook.

They met each other's eyes, Todd feeling something soften slightly within him, despite the situation.

Todd replied, "B-Because I just couldn't. It's too much, too many of my feelings, and I was scared that if I told you, you'd hate me forever and I really couldn't live with myself if that happened."

"I could never hate you, Todd." Neil said simply, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world, "I don't care about the letters really, I love you and nothing will change that, but I care that you kept this from me. I want to know how you feel and what you think, no matter the day or time."

"You don't find it weird?" Todd felt severely unprepared, he really wasn't expecting Neil to react like this. After their months of friendship, Todd was still half expecting Neil to punch him in the face and throw him out at any slight inconvenience.

"Not in the slightest, darling." Neil said, causing Todd to blush faintly. "I'll admit I was a bit surprised, but I understand."

"What, you understand that I've been in love with you since before I even met you?" Todd laughed, trying to joke away his concerns.

Neil smiled softly, "Maybe I've felt the same."

Todd leaned in, grabbing the back of Neil's head as he went to kiss him. It felt natural, if you forgot about the faint taste of salt, tears and cigarette smoke.

"Oh," Neil exclaimed, suddenly pulling away from the kiss, "I forgot

to ask, since when do you know French?"

Todd sighed at the loss of contact before answering "My mom's French, she stopped speaking it when she got married. I guess my father didn't want her to speak a foreign language…"

Neil took Todd's hand, squeezing it lightly, "That's terrible. I'm so sorry."

"Don't be, it's my father that should be the one apologising. Anyway, when I was younger, they had to take Jeffery to these competitions so I'd stay with Grandma. She taught me French, and when she died I promised myself I'd never forget it. Language of love and romance, isn't it?"

They sat down on the bed, Neil draping his arm around Todd's shoulder.

"Fancy translating some of these for me?" Neil asked.

Todd laughed, hiding his face behind his hand, "Absolutely not, I'm burning all that corny shit the moment I leave this room."

"Nooooo!" Neil exclaimed dramatically, "You can't do this to me! I won't let you!"

"Always the theatre kid, aren't you?"

"Of course! Todd Anderson, love of my life, my soulmate, my beloved, would you please please please read some of these to me? Neil asked,

dramatically batting his eyelashes.

Todd laughed, “I’m not gonna read them to you, I can write the translations though, if you’d like?”

Neil nodded excitedly in approval, before adding “I think you should read that poem, at the Poets meeting tonight. You don’t have to, of course, but I’d really like that. I’m sure the others would too”

Todd shifted uncomfortably, he wanted to read the poem, he wanted to declare his love for Neil to everyone. However, he also knew that he wouldn’t be able to speak more than a line without clamming up and running away.

“I’ll think about it.” was all that Todd said.

“So, about that game of chess?”

In all honesty, Todd had completely forgotten about their previous plans. He took out the old chess set, gifted by his Grandma, and began to set up the board.

Neil was looking at him with a slightly dazed expression, occasionally glancing at the red notebook. Nevertheless, his attention didn’t stray for long. Everytime Todd frowned and rearranged a piece that didn’t look quite right, Neil smiled slightly to himself and prayed the moment wouldn’t end.

After a few moments, Todd said, “I’m not that great at chess, go easy on me,”

“Oh, absolutely not, Anderson.” Neil smirked.

They played in relative silence, only occasionally broken by a quiet sigh from Todd and a very loud exclamative from Neil.

Neil very quickly realised that Todd’s previous statement about being bad at chess was untrue. Neil wasn’t bad at chess, per say, but he usually relied on the first move he thought of, rather than calculating which move would prove the most useful. On the other hand, Todd studied the board with as much fervour as he did when he came across a poem or book he particularly liked.

After an hour or two, Neil hadn’t won a single game. ‘Not winning’ was a strong term, he was in fact losing so horrendously, he vowed to never play chess with Todd again. In the back of his mind, he knew that Todd could probably ask once and he would agree without a cent of hesitation.

Without much of a warning, their dorm suddenly bursted open, causing Todd to jump slightly and skewer the board.

“Hey guys, what are we up to?” Charlie asked, completely unaware of the disruption he’d caused, “Mind if I come sit with you?”

Todd caught Neil’s eye, trying to communicate silently, “How come you're not off bullying Knox or someone?”

“Ah, he won’t stop banging on about that Chris girl, you know the one he met once and now seems to be in love with forever?” Something much like sorrow passed over Charlie’s face, before melting back into his easy smile, “Anyway, she’s gone back to her ex, something about how he’s her *soulmate*. Whatever, doesn’t matter much now. So, what

are we up to?

Before Todd could respond, Neil jumped in “Just playing chess with Todd, nothing much.”

“You played with Todd? Jeez man, he’s like a chess *master*. Why on earth would you do that to yourself?” Charlie asked, dramatically creating a look of joking concern and distress.

“Yes, Charlie,” Neil said bitterly, “I can see that now.”

“I beat him 13 times,” Todd helpfully interjected.

After a few more games, Neil and Charlie formed an alliance against Todd (though, discussing their moves out loud didn’t really give them much of an advantage). Still managing to lose, they all decided to get ready and head for the cave.

Charlie didn’t speak much on the journey there, he opted for walking next to Knox and listening to him rant about Chris.

“Todd?” Neil began to ask, “Charles and Knox need to shut up and kiss already, don’t you think?”

Todd was slightly taken aback by Neil’s question, “Did you just call him Charles? Anyway, they’ll figure it out soon.”

“Who knows, maybe Charlie's been secretly writing love letters to him?”

Todd went to hit Neil, landing an arm on his bicep, “Shut up, you.”

Neil hummed in response, taking Todd’s hand. It was alright, doing this under the cover of night. No one would notice, right? Even if they did, it was easy to play it off, Todd thought. Pretend one of them was scared of the dark, or one had fallen over.

They reached the cave, Pitts trying (and failing) to start a fire, much like always. Neil read the beginning poem, the light illuminating him and making him look like some angelic creature.

“Scholars, pals, Welton men, Cameron, I shall be reading first,” Charlie said, directly after Neil had finished.

No one said anything when Charlie pulled out a slip of paper rather than looking in the book, half were expecting some sort of dirty poem, while the other half expected another instalment of Poetrusic.

“*There are no reasons*

And if there are, I’m wrong

But at least I won’t have spent my life waiting

Looking for God in the clouds of the dawn

Listening out for otherworldly contact

30 billion light years on”

Whilst the others had been focusing on the poem, Todd had been focusing on Charlie. His eyes didn’t once glance at the paper, instead choosing to gaze at Knox. Todd recognised that look, the look that

tried to convey all the things that were better off left unsaid, unacknowledged.

Neil spoke first, his voice cutting through the thick tension of the cave, “Beautiful poem, Char. I think that’s your best work to date. Who’s next?”

Meeks went next, reading a poem about the revealing nature of rain, or something along those lines.

Again, Todd wasn’t focused on the poem. Knox was staring at Charlie, some form of reckless abandon in his eyes. It wasn’t just reckless, Todd thought, it was love.

Both of them should really stop being blind.

Chapter End Notes

who would i be without a cheeky slither of knarlie
poem is from 'violet bent backwards over the grass' by lana del rey
writing this instead of my essays was a mistake
love you all so much, comments and kudos always appreciated and loved :D
happy birthday to those of you who celebrate
- L x

Chapter 13: yesterday

Chapter Notes

> sorry for my long absence you guys i have been completely drowning in exams :(
> final chapter yayyyy !!! i lied there is no happy ending...or is there?
> i just want to say a massive thank you to everyone who has read this fic, i honestly appreciate all of you so much and seeing all of the support ive gotten has been crazy. i first started writing this when i was in a pretty dark place in my life and just having this escape to write down my thoughts has been so incredibly helpful !!
> i will be back with an epilouge after my maths mock bc i need to lock in for that !

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It was too late for this, if half-past 7 in the evening could be called late. Todd had just come back from a soccer game, it was a terrifying defeat. Todd had scored the one and only goal for Welton's team, while the other team seemed to score every minute of the game.

He was now sitting around a small table in the common room, attempting to get as much of his homework done as possible, before inevitably giving up and sobbing into his pillow. Meeks was explaining some complicated physics to Todd, Charlie, and Knox, while Pitts and Cameron were working on latin conjucations.

"I don't get it," Charlie deadpanned, losing his ability to joke.

Meeks sighed, "Well if you paid attention for once,"

Before anyone could reply, Neil walked through the door.

"Hey guys," Neil said, smiling at Todd, "What are you up to?"

Todd replied, "Latin. The sheet that's due tomorrow."

Neil raised his eyebrows, "Sounds fun. Anyone wanna join me for a walk around the lake?"

He shot Todd a look, one that meant *please come with me*.

“I’ll go! Please, Neil, save me from this awful place!” Charlie dramatically exclaimed.

Neil looked slightly taken aback, composing himself quickly, “Fine. Todd, you coming?”

Charlie grinned knowingly, “Actually, I think I’ll stay.”

Todd looked around at his friends, no one seemed to particularly care for Charlie’s remark.

“Yeah,” Todd said breathlessly, “I could go for a walk right now.”

****

“This doesn’t look much like a walk to me, Neil.” Todd said, throwing himself on the bed.

Neil smiled, extending a hand, “Well it’s cold outside, sweetheart, and I’d much rather be in here with you than out in the cold again.”

“How was the rehearsal?” Todd asked, taking Neil’s hand and pulling himself up.

“Same as ever. People forgetting lines, people running all over the stage, people tripping over the stage-”

Todd smiled first, his cute crooked smile that he rarely ever showed, and Neil mirrored it without a second thought. There was something so uncomplicated in that, something that made Todd laugh under his breath as he leaned in, like they were sharing some stupid inside joke neither of them could really explain. When their lips met, it was soft, warm and familiar, like the kind of kiss that felt like coming home after a hard day or night.

Neil tasted like coffee and cigarette smoke. His hands slid over Todd’s waist, fingers curling there as if they’d always belonged. The world narrowed to the quiet sounds between them: their breathing, the faint hitch when he smiled into hismouth. Happiness bloomed easily, brightly, and for a few seconds it was simple. Just them. Just this. No worries for what was on the other side of the door.

Then *that* feeling crept in.

Not enough to ruin it. Just enough to ache somewhere in Todd’s heart.

Neil kissed him a little slower, a little deeper, like he was trying to

memorise the shape of the way his lips moved against Todd's. His hand rested at Neil's jaw, steady and warm, but it didn't let go when the kiss broke. Instead, he leaned his forehead against hers, eyes closed, as if he needed the contact to stay alive.

"I've missed you," Todd said quietly, voice barely above a whisper.

Neil smiled, still half dazed from the kiss "Me too."

They kissed again, gentler this time, the kind of kiss that wasn't about urgency but domesticity and the promise of something *more.* There was undeniable happiness in it, but somewhere in the back of Todd's mind was the knowledge that *this wouldn't last forever.* That didn't make it worse. If anything, it made it precious.

When they finally pulled apart, they stayed close, hands still touching, smiles still there. Todd's sadness didn't disappear, but it softened, cushioned by warmth and choice.

Whatever came next could wait.

Their friends, their schoolwork, even the world outside those goddamn gates could wait.

For now, they had this—and Todd leaned in once more, happy enough to feel it, brave enough to let it hurt just a little.

"You okay?" Neil asked, still holding Todd by the waist and looking into his eyes.

"Yeah," Todd breathed out, "I just…wasn't expecting that."

Neil laughed, breaking his contact and walking backwards, "Careful now, don't start something you can't finish, my love."

Todd walked towards him once more, "Come on, just one more?"

"Can't say no to you,"

Todd leaned in, barely catching Neil's lips before the door flung open.

Neil jumped backwards, getting a door to the face and closet to the back.

"Hey guys, what's going on here?" Knox asked, seemingly oblivious to the chaos he inflicted.

Charlie smirked knowingly, “I think we all know what was happening here,”

“You’re not gonna ask if I’m okay?” Neil said weakly.

Todd peered at Neil, a look of concern taking over his face,”Are you okay?”

“I’m fine,” Neil smiled, “I promise,”

Meeks sighed, “Lord, we really were blind.”

Charlie shut the door quickly, their group of friends standing expectedly waiting for some grand reveal.

“Are you gonna tell us? Or do we have to figure it out for ourselves?” Charlie asked.

“Figure out what-” Cameron tried to ask.

The silence was deafening.

Todd stiffened.

Neil didn’t look at him.

“Since when do you two run away to your room together” Meeks asked, trying for casual, flipping Charlie’s lighter open and shut in his palm.

No one answered.

Cameron’s eyes moved between them, sharp as knives.

“Don’t joke about those kinds of things,” he said.

Neilfinally glanced at Todd, the look brief but unguarded, the kind that had no place in this room, in this school, in this lifetime.

Silence followed. Was it confusion? Was it recognition?

“Oh,” Knox said softly, almost to himself, falling back onto the bed.

“How long?” Pitts asked, voice full of something that couldn’t be placed.

Cameron demanded “Jesus Christ, how long have you been lying to

us?”

Neil opened his mouth, then closed it, jaw tight.

For once, Charlie didn’t say anything. He couldn’t.

He didn’t know what to say.

“We were careful.” Todd whispered, staring at the floor.

“We didn’t mean for you guys to find out,” Neil added, “We didn’t want to involve you.”

Todd finally looked back at Neil, something in the air softening at the look.

“You’re still our best friends, you know this doesn’t change anything” Meeks said, the others nodding in approval.

“We don’t care,” Knox stated, “Well, we care about you but not about this…thing.”

Todd looked up at their friends, feeling eternally grateful that these people were his friends.

He finally felt accepted.

For the first time, this whole secret didn’t feel like it needed guarding. The room didn’t close in when Todd spoke, and no one flinched at the realisation. Acceptance settled over him quietly, like warmth after a long cold, no dramatic curtain of realisation, just the steady relief of being seen and not turned away. Todd realized, with a soft kind of wonder, that they belonged here exactly as they were.

Charlie turned serious, “This doesn’t leave this room. None of this.”

Neil looked like he was on the verge of sobbing, “Please, please don’t tell anyone,”

“They won’t tell a soul,” Charlie reassured.

One by one, they filtered out the room, leaving behind all the weight and tension of what could be better off left unsaid.

After Knox left, giving them both a soft smile, Todd collapsed onto the floor.

“Shit, Todd, are you okay?” Neil said, dropping next to Todd.

Todd tried to control his thoughts, he didn’t want to spill out everything that was running through his mind.

“I’m okay. I just…I just really didn’t expect that to happen.”

Neil wrapped his arms around Todd, “Me neither, love. Could’ve gone a lot worse, yeah?”

Todd laughed sadly, “I guess.”

He stood up, walked over to his closet. “I’m going to bed now, early night.” Todd said.

Neil nodded, also walking over to his closet and pulling out his favourite pajamas.

“I love you,” Neil blurted out.

“I love you too,” Todd answered without a second thought.

“So, how do you feel now? It’s all out there.” Neil asked, contemplating the question as he said it.

“It could get us killed. Or worse. I’m happy that we don’t have to hide this, but it's dangerous, Neil.” Todd answered.

“Worse?”

“Imagine if Welton found out? If our friends could walk in here, couldn’t literally any teacher do the same?”

“Mr Keating wouldn’t tell them,” Neil countered.

“Mr Keating’s different, you know that, Neil. We’d be sent off somewhere, we’d never see each other again. And in all honesty I don’t know if I could survive that,”

“So, what now? Do we stop this relationship before it gets futile?” Neil demanded, trying to keep the anger from seeping into his voice

Todd sighed, neatly folding up his clothes, “That’s not what I meant, love. We’ve just gotta be more careful.”

“*More* careful?”

“Yes, *Neil*, more careful. Like locking doors and less kissing in public areas?”

“But I like kissing you in public areas!”

“Not anymore, you don’t”

“Well, I’m going to bed now if you’d like to join,” Todd suggested, already climbing under his covers.

Neil wordlessly joined Todd, wrapping his arms around Todd’s waist like it was the last time before losing him forever.

“I love you so much, Todd. And I’m proud of you, that was a difficult thing we did today,” Neil whispered into the night air.

Todd shuffled so he was facing Neil, “I’m proud of you too, let’s just hope it stays this way for a long time, yeah?”

****

It had been a few days since their grand relationship ‘reveal’, and nothing much had shifted in their friendgroup. The air had changed, only slightly, and Cameron didn’t much like being alone with the two.

The others acted normal, apart from the occasional teasing comment from either Meeks or Charlie, and Todd had felt free in a way that he hadn’t for a long time.

Everything was fine, better than fine actually.

Happiness wasn’t something that came natural to Todd, but he did feel truly happy in those few days before his world collapsed.

It was meant to be a normal day, just like any other regular Wednesday where Neil had gone out for rehearsals and Todd finished whatever homework he remembered to do.

Todd was in Knox’s room, sitting and chatting with Knox about whatever topic came across their minds.

(“A trombone?” Todd asked skeptically, “Who on earth would want to be a trombone when they grew up?”

“Me, apparently,” Knox asked.)

Todd was, of course, missing Neil.

Little did he know that across the hall Neil was sitting in their room, speaking to someone.

****

Neil walked into his room, not expecting to see his father sitting on his desk chair stonefaced.

“Hello Sir-” Neil began.

His father raised a hand, too calm for Neil’s liking, “I received a call today, from a friend of yours. A Mr Richard Cameron?”

“Oh?”

“Yes. He informed me that he was worried about you. Mr Cameron mentioned that you’ve been getting close with the Anderson boy. An unholy relationship, he called it. Sinning.”

He never imagined betrayal would sound so insignificant,a phone call, but it tore through him like something ripping that would never be whole again.

Mr Perry continued, “You know this is wrong. You’re not my son anymore, no son of mine would do something this disgusting and dirty. This Richard boy has been more of a son to you in our five minute call than you have ever been in your life. You disgust me.”

Cameron, his friend, the one person he trusted with the parts of himself he kept hidden, had called his father and handed over his secrets without hesitation. It felt like being exposed in a room he was already afraid of, his pain turned into evidence against him. A gun pointing at his head just waiting for someone to pull the trigger.

“I can explain-” Neil began, tears already pooling in his eyes.

“No, Neil, I’ve heard enough. You are to move out immediately, out of this school and out of my house. I don’t care where you go, I won’t have you *infecting* my house with your nonsense.”

Neil felt like the trigger had now been pressed, all his life, his friends, his school, his mother, Todd, had all gone in a puff of smoke. What did he have now? He didn’t even have anywhere to live, no one to go to.

“And I think I’ll talk with that *friend* of yours, Anderson. God only

knows how a boy from that family turned out to be Satan himself. He infected you, didn't he?"

Neil's sadness turned to anger, forgetting all his fears for a moment.

"You will not talk to him," Neil spat out.

"Why would I listen to you?"

"I'll tell them, I'll tell everyone your son is a homosexual and goddamn it I don't care if I ruin my life. You will not speak to him, you won't even look in his direction."

"You wouldn't dare. I'm doing you a favour by not calling the police and having you arrested or hung," Mr Perry argued.

"A favour? You just don't want your perfect reputation ruined."

"Fine. But you will not contact anyone at this school anymore."

"I'll say goodbye then," Neil whispered, trying not to let his father see how much this decision weighed on him. It would only make things worse.

What hurt most wasn't the consequences, or even the anger that followed, but the realization that his trust had meant nothing, their years of friendship gone with *one fucking phone call*.

In the quiet hallway afterward, he was left alone with a grief so heavy it pressed on his chest, mourning not just the fallout, but the friend he thought he had—someone who chose betrayal when he needed protection most.

It wasn't just Cameron he was angry about, he was angry at himself. Angry and frustrated that he let this go so far, that he'd hurt Todd.

Neil swore to himself that he would find Todd again, search the ends of the earth if he had to.

He couldn't bring himself to say goodbye, that would make his leaving real.

Neil had no place to go, he didn't have anywhere to live. But somehow that didn't matter, all that mattered was not hurting anyone else.

He reckoned with the thought that Todd would be better off without

him, better off without his *disease*.

The play crossed his mind, he didn't imagine he would be giving up acting this fast. If there was one comforting experience about this whole ordeal, it was the fact he would be finally free from his fathers hand.

No more being crushed under the weight of expectations.

No more medicine or doctor or chemistry summer schools.

No more Dead Poets Society.

Nothing felt okay anymore, all Neil's fears had come crushing down at once and he felt he was drowning. Maybe drowning was the way out of this mess?

He felt slightly more grounded against the cool floor of the hallway, like he couldn't fall much further.

It didn't take long to pack up his things, all he took was whatever clothes he could fit in his suitcase and Todd's red notebook.

He needed something to read to remind himself that Todd was still in this world when times got too hard.

In that final moment where he looked back at the gates of Welton for one last time, he knew three things were certain:

Neil hated his father.

Neil loved Todd.

Neil would never trust a friend again.

Chapter End Notes

IM A RICHARD CAMERON APOLOGIST SO IM SORRY IF THAT DIDNT COME ACROSS MUCH
yeah there is no happy ending here sorry for that
follow me on tiktok i make dps edits (spidey.lana)
the ending of my first fic !! the next thing i write will hopefully be far better
i love all of you and i hope everyone who reads this has the best 2026
yours sincerely,
L <3

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!